

### Field Guides Tour Report

# Spain: La Mancha, Coto Donana & Extremadura 2015

May 2, 2015 to May 14, 2015 Chris Benesh & Godfried Schreur

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.



A few of the scenic highlights of the Spain tour -- the Molinos of La Mancha; the interior of the Mezquita in Cordoba; the main plaza in Trujillo; and Penafalcon at Monfrague. (Photos by guide Chris Benesh)

It was terrific to get back to Spain on the Field Guides 2015 tour. We were fortunate to have excellent weather for the majority of the trip. We met up in Madrid, and then headed south to the La Mancha area. Right off the bat, we picked up a nice variety of waterbirds, including Common Shelduck, Little Ringed Plover, and Wood Sandpiper. Based at Alcazar de San Juan, we were close to some wonderful wetlands and also close to some of the classic Spanish Molinos (Windmills). We then headed south to Donana, stopping along the way to enjoy the Tablas de Damiel and the Mezquita in Cordoba. We then had two days birding in and around Donana, with some memorable encounters with Spanish Imperial Eagle, some coastal beach species, and a variety of waterbirds.

From there we headed north toward Extremadura, with stops along the way for *Cercotrichas galactotes* (known by various common names, e.g., Rufous Bush Robin, Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin), and a productive visit to Alange, where we picked up Black Wheatear and Bonelli's Eagle among others. We spent the late afternoon exploring the hilltop city of Trujillo. The next day we were out on the pseudo-steppe west of town tracking down sandgrouse and bustards, along with some harriers. We then headed to Monfrague where we spent a couple of glorious days exploring that rugged landscape.

The Salto de Gitano and Penafalcon at Monfrague are spectacular, with raptors streaming past in numbers. The spectacle of Griffon Vultures zooming past is unforgettable. There were plenty of other treats too, from Black Storks to Black-eared Wheatears to Western Orphean Warbler. And, finally, we were off to the Gredos, a spectacular landscape of granite and broom, complete with breeding Bluethroats and Sky Larks, as well as a nice variety of pine forest species. We had a few bonus treats by way of Red-backed Shrikes, recent colonists to the central ranges of Spain.

It's difficult to pick out all of the highlights but, as chosen by you, Spanish Imperial Eagle was the trip favorite. No surprise there, as we had outstanding views. The amazing Bluethroat was second. In third place was the iconic White Stork, while Red-necked Nightjar, Hawfinch, Red Kite, Great Bustard, Marbled Duck, Mistle Thrush, and Zitting Cisticola each received two votes. And finally, Woodchat Shrike, Red-backed Shrike, Bee-eater, Crested Tit, White-headed Duck, Griffon Vulture, Blue Rock Thrush, Ortolan Bunting, and Bearded Reedling also received mention.

--Chris

#### KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

### **BIRDS**

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**GRAYLAG GOOSE** (EUROPEAN) (Anser anser anser) – Good numbers at Damiel where they have been breeding in increasing numbers since 2009.

**COMMON SHELDUCK** (Tadorna tadorna) **GADWALL** (Anas strepera)

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MALLARD (Anas platyrhynchos)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (Anas clypeata)

GARGANEY (Anas querquedula) – A real treat seeing a few of these at Laguna de Alcazar.

MARBLED TEAL (Marmaronetta angustirostris) – We were super fortunate to find this Marbled Teal at the Dehesa de Abajo. This species has declined dramatically in Spain and is considered critically endangered there. It was apparently the most common duck in the Donana region in the 19th century.

RED-CRESTED POCHARD (Netta rufina)

**COMMON POCHARD** (Aythya ferina)

WHITE-HEADED DUCK (Oxyura leucocephala) – This species seems to be doing quite well. We had quite a few in La Mancha.

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)

**EARED GREBE** (Podiceps nigricollis) – Known as Black-necked Grebes in Europe.

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (Phoenicopterus roseus) – Fantastic to see these colorful birds.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (Ciconia nigra) - Nice looks at this species at Monfrague.

WHITE STORK (Ciconia ciconia) - Widespread and iconic.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (Phalacrocorax carbo) – A few of these at Tablas de Damiel and Donana.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**GREAT BITTERN** (Botaurus stellaris) – Heard booming at Donana. [\*]

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) - Best views were at Donana.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (Nycticorax nycticorax)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (Plegadis falcinellus)

EURASIAN SPOONBILL (Platalea leucorodia)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE (Elanus caeruleus) - An amazing four seen!

EGYPTIAN VULTURE (Neophron percnopterus) - Not many around, but some good views of the ones that were.

CINEREOUS VULTURE (Aegypius monachus) – Locally known as Black Vulture, quite unrelated to the New World Black Vulture.

**EURASIAN GRIFFON** (Gyps fulvus) – Really spectacular to see so many of these magnificent flyers.

SHORT-TOED EAGLE (Circaetus gallicus)

**BOOTED EAGLE** (Hieraaetus pennatus)

**SPANISH EAGLE** (Aquila adalberti) – Nice to hear that this species is increasing in Spain. We had terrific views of one at Donana, and again at Monfrague.

GOLDEN EAGLE (Aquila chrysaetos)

**BONELLI'S EAGLE** (Aquila fasciata) – Sadly, this species has declined in some parts of Spain, believed to be in part due to shooting by pigeon racers, as one of the eagle's favorite prey are pigeons.

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (Circus aeruginosus)

NORTHERN HARRIER (EURASIAN) (Circus cyaneus cyaneus) - Known locally as Hen Harrier.

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (Circus pygargus) – Some nice views of this elegant species.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK (Accipiter nisus) – A couple seen near our lodging in the Gredos.

**RED KITE** (Milvus milvus) – Much rarer than Black, we had a few good studies along the way.

BLACK KITE (Milvus migrans)

COMMON BUZZARD (Buteo buteo)

Otididae (Bustards)

GREAT BUSTARD (Otis tarda) - We had five Great Bustards on our morning outing to the pseudo steppes near Santa Marta.

LITTLE BUSTARD (Tetrax tetrax) – Scary to see how much this species had declined since my last visit to Spain. We were able to scope one near Santa Marta.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

WATER RAIL (Rallus aquaticus) [\*]

PURPLE SWAMPHEN (EUROPEAN) (Porphyrio porphyrio porphyrio) - Note that Purple Swamphen has recently been split into several species.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (Gallinula chloropus) – Different than the Common Gallinule found in the New World differing primarily by voice.

**RED-KNOBBED COOT** (Fulica cristata) – We did see two of these thanks to some great local knowledge and a bit of luck. At the northern extreme of their range here.

EURASIAN COOT (Fulica atra)

Burhinidae (Thick-knees)

**EURASIAN THICK-KNEE** (Burhinus oedicnemus)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

**BLACK-WINGED STILT** (Himantopus himantopus)

PIED AVOCET (Recurvirostra avosetta)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (Haematopus ostralegus) – Small numbers were along the beach at Donana.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

NORTHERN LAPWING (Vanellus vanellus)

KENTISH PLOVER (KENTISH) (Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus)

**COMMON RINGED PLOVER** (Charadrius hiaticula) – Really impressive flocks of this species at Donana.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (Charadrius dubius) – Nice views of one on the first birding stop of the tour.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (Actitis hypoleucos)

SPOTTED REDSHANK (Tringa erythropus) - It was way out there, but there was a single Spotted Redshank at Miguel Estiban.

**COMMON GREENSHANK** (Tringa nebularia)

WOOD SANDPIPER (Tringa glareola) - Seen on three different days.

COMMON REDSHANK (Tringa totanus)

WHIMBREL (Numenius phaeopus) - One seen on the beach at Donana.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (Limosa limosa)

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (Arenaria interpres)

RUFF (Calidris pugnax) – At least 10 of these were at Miguel Estiban.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** (Calidris ferruginea)

SANDERLING (Calidris alba)

**DUNLIN** (Calidris alpina)

LITTLE STINT (Calidris minuta)

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

COLLARED PRATINCOLE (Glareola pratincola)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SLENDER-BILLED GULL (Chroicocephalus genei) - Four seen in flight at Donana. Another Mediterranean endemic.

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** (Chroicocephalus ridibundus)

AUDOUIN'S GULL (Ichthyaetus audouinii) - Some good studies of this species on the beach at Donana. This species is a Mediterranean endemic.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL (Larus michahellis)

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (Larus fuscus)

LITTLE TERN (Sternula albifrons) – Some nice looks at a few on the beach at Donana.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (Gelochelidon nilotica)

BLACK TERN (Chlidonias niger)

WHISKERED TERN (Chlidonias hybrida)

Pteroclidae (Sandgrouse)

PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE (Pterocles alchata) – Well studied in the scopes near Santa Marta.

BLACK-BELLIED SANDGROUSE (Pterocles orientalis) - Well seen in flight near Santa Marta.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (Columba livia)

STOCK DOVE (Columba oenas) - Rather scarce in Spain, so a couple at Laguna Alcazar was a treat.

**COMMON WOOD-PIGEON** (Columba palumbus)

**EUROPEAN TURTLE-DOVE** (Streptopelia turtur)

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (Streptopelia decaocto)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

**COMMON CUCKOO** (Cuculus canorus) – Nice looks on our way to Monfrague.

Strigidae (Owls)

LITTLE OWL (Athene noctua)

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

**RED-NECKED NIGHTJAR** (Caprimulgus ruficollis) – A magical night near Torrejon el Rubio where we watched a pair of nightjars courting in the fading light. Super!

Apodidae (Swifts)

**ALPINE SWIFT** (Apus melba) – The best views were at Alange.

**COMMON SWIFT** (Apus apus)

PALLID SWIFT (Apus pallidus) – Nice studies of birds coming to drink at a pond at Donana.

WHITE-RUMPED SWIFT (Apus caffer) – Hugh spotted the first of these at Penafalcon and another three were seen the following day as well nearby.

<u> Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)</u>

**COMMON KINGFISHER** (Alcedo atthis)

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

EUROPEAN BEE-EATER (Merops apiaster)

Coraciidae (Rollers)

**EUROPEAN ROLLER** (Coracias garrulus) – Seeing one inside Donana was a real treat!

<u>Upupidae (Hoopoes)</u>

**EURASIAN HOOPOE** (Upupa epops) – Encountered almost daily, it took awhile before we really had good views of it.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (Dendrocopos major) – A couple of these fancy woodpeckers seen.

**EURASIAN GREEN WOODPECKER (IBERIAN)** (Picus viridis sharpei) – Two were seen up in the Gredos. The subspecies sharpei is perhaps a candidate to be split in future.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

LESSER KESTREL (Falco naumanni)

**EURASIAN KESTREL** (Falco tinnunculus)

PEREGRINE FALCON (Falco peregrinus)

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

MONK PARAKEET (Myiopsitta monachus) – Ed spotted this species as we were coming back into Madrid, and several had seen it there just before we met up for the trip. [I]

Laniidae (Shrikes)

**RED-BACKED SHRIKE** (Lanius collurio) – This species has recently expanded its range south to the Central Range (Gredos). Godfried took us to a territory on the way to the Plataforma, and we came across another territory at Pena Negra.

**SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE** (Lanius meridionalis)

WOODCHAT SHRIKE (Lanius senator)

Oriolidae (Old World Orioles)

**EURASIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE** (Oriolus oriolus)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

EURASIAN JAY (Garrulus glandarius)

**IBERIAN MAGPIE** (Cyanopica cooki) – This is the western form of Azure-winged Magpie, split by some authorities. It is believed to have diverged from eastern birds at least one million years ago.

EURASIAN MAGPIE (Pica pica) – Formerly conspecific with the Black-billed Magpie, this species differs vocally.

EURASIAN JACKDAW (Corvus monedula)

**CARRION CROW** (Corvus corone)

COMMON RAVEN (Corvus corax)

Panuridae (Bearded Reedling)

**BEARDED REEDLING** (Panurus biarmicus) – What a terrific bird. We had a few skittish ones at Laguna Alcazar and then some cooperative ones at Tablas de Damiel.

#### <u> Alaudidae (Larks)</u>

CALANDRA LARK (Melanocorypha calandra) - Impressively broad wings.

GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK (Calandrella brachydactyla)

LESSER SHORT-TOED LARK (Calandrella rufescens) – Nice views after some searching at Donana.

CRESTED LARK (Galerida cristata)

THEKLA LARK (Galerida theklae)

SKY LARK (Alauda arvensis)

WOOD LARK (Lullula arborea)

#### 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 (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

**COAL TIT** (Periparus ater)

**CRESTED TIT** (Lophophanes cristatus) – This is the species that looks a bit like a Bridled Titmouse.

**GREAT TIT** (Parus major)

**EURASIAN BLUE TIT** (Cyanistes caeruleus)

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

EURASIAN PENDULINE-TIT (Remiz pendulinus) – Quite a few around this year with good looks at Laguna Alcazar and Tablas de Damiel.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

LONG-TAILED TIT (Aegithalos caudatus)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**EURASIAN NUTHATCH** (Sitta europaea)

<u>Certhiidae (Treecreepers)</u>

SHORT-TOED TREECREEPER (Certhia brachydaetyla)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**EURASIAN WREN** (Troglodytes troglodytes) – No longer considered conspecific with the Winter Wren.

<u>Regulidae (Kinglets)</u>

GOLDCREST (Regulus regulus)

FIRECREST (Regulus ignicapilla)

Cettiidae (Bush-Warblers and Allies)

CETTI'S WARBLER (Cettia cetti)

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

WILLOW WARBLER (Phylloscopus trochilus) - A migrant at Donana.

**COMMON CHIFFCHAFF** (Phylloscopus collybita)

IBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF (Phylloscopus ibericus) – Well heard at Donana, though we couldn't do any better than perhaps a glimpse. [\*]

WESTERN BONELLI'S WARBLER (Phylloscopus bonelli)

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

WESTERN OLIVACEOUS WARBLER (Iduna opaca) - Also known as Isabelline Warbler, we had a few furtive birds in the tamarisk trees in drier parts of Donana.

MELODIOUS WARBLER (Hippolais polyglotta) - Quite common in the Donana region.

EURASIAN REED-WARBLER (Acrocephalus scirpaceus)

**GREAT REED-WARBLER** (Acrocephalus arundinaceus)

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies)

SAVI'S WARBLER (Locustella luscinioides)

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

ZITTING CISTICOLA (Cisticola juncidis)

<u>Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)</u>

**BLACKCAP** (Sylvia atricapilla)

**GARDEN WARBLER** (Sylvia borin)

WESTERN ORPHEAN WARBLER (Sylvia hortensis) – We spent a fair bit of time trying to get good views of this oak species at our place in Monfrague. It was impressive to see the size of their territories.

SUBALPINE WARBLER (INORNATA) (Sylvia cantillans inornata) – Some authors have split the Iberian birds as Western Subalpine Warbler.

SARDINIAN WARBLER (Sylvia melanocephala)

**GREATER WHITETHROAT** (Sylvia communis)

SPECTACLED WARBLER (Sylvia conspicillata) – Nice views of a singing bird at Laguna Alcazar, including doing some flight songs. Field Guides Birding Tours • www.fieldguides.com • 800-728-4953

DARTFORD WARBLER (Sylvia undata) - Best views were at Puerto Pena Negra.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (Muscicapa striata)

RUFOUS-TAILED SCRUB-ROBIN (Cercotrichas galactotes) – Though it has different names, we had great looks at a stakeout near Almondrelejo. One of my favorites.

**EUROPEAN ROBIN** (Erithacus rubecula)

**COMMON NIGHTINGALE** (Luscinia megarhynchos)

BLUETHROAT (Luscinia svecica) - Wow! We had phenomenal views of one in the Gredos Mountains. Birds here have a solid blue throat.

EUROPEAN PIED FLYCATCHER (Ficedula hypoleuca)

**BLACK REDSTART** (Phoenicurus ochruros)

RUFOUS-TAILED ROCK-THRUSH (Monticola saxatilis) – Several nice studies of this species in the Gredos.

**BLUE ROCK-THRUSH** (Monticola solitarius)

WHINCHAT (Saxicola rubetra)

EUROPEAN STONECHAT (Saxicola rubicola rubicola)

BLACK WHEATEAR (Oenanthe leucura) – One of the tougher wheatears to track down, we did score with this species at Alange.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (Oenanthe oenanthe)

BLACK-EARED WHEATEAR (Oenanthe hispanica) - We saw both black-throated and pale-throated forms of this species at Monfrague.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

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 (ASHY-HEADED) (Motacilla flava iberiae)

GRAY WAGTAIL (Motacilla cinerea)

WHITE WAGTAIL (Motacilla alba)

WATER PIPIT (Anthus spinoletta)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

CIRL BUNTING (Emberiza cirlus) – Despite hearing quite a few, it took a bit of time before we got good views.

ROCK BUNTING (Emberiza cia)

**ORTOLAN BUNTING** (Emberiza hortulana)

CORN BUNTING (Emberiza calandra) – Ubiquitous, I think everyone developed a fondness for this common species.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

COMMON CHAFFINCH (Fringilla coelebs)

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (Chloris chloris)

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (Carduelis carduelis)

EURASIAN LINNET (Carduelis cannabina)

CITRIL FINCH (Serinus citrinella) - Alas, seen by Ed and Allison only.

**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)

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

COMMON WAXBILL (Estrilda astrild) [I]

# **MAMMALS**

OLD WORLD RABBIT (Oryctolagus cuniculus)

CAPE HARE (Lepus capensis) – The taxonomy of these is a bit confused, but hares here are currently believed to be Iberian Hare, L. granatensis.

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (Sciurus vulgaris) - A fancy tassel eared species.

**RED FOX** (Vulpes vulpes)

WILD BOAR (Sus scrofa)

FALLOW DEER (Dama dama)

**RED DEER** (Cervus elaphus)

ROE DEER (Capreolus capreolus) – One seen sprinting off in the Gredos.

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

A Few Other Critters:

Soprano Pipistrelle (Pipistrellus pygmaeus)

European Pond Terrapin (Emys orbicularis)

Spanish (Striped-necked) Terrapin (Mauremys leprosa)

Viperine Snake (Natrix maura)

Ladder "Leather" Snake (Elaphe scalaris)

Moorish Gecko (Tarentola mauritanica)

Ocellated Lizard (Lacerta lepida)

Schreiber's Lizard (Lacerta schreiberi)

Iberian Wall Lizard (Podarcis sp. for. hispanica)

Large Psammodromus (Psammodromus algirus)

toad spp.

scorpions

Totals for the tour: 199 bird taxa and 9 mammal taxa