

Extremadura Wildlife trip report: March 13-17th 2016*Day 1. Madrid-Arrocampo*

This year I have been invited by the Valencian Government to the Extremadura birdfair (FIO 2016) to promote wildlife tourism in my region "Valencia and Alicante". Once the fair finished on Sunday 13th, I drove to Madrid to pick up Beatrice, Tom, Matthew and Susan from Barajas' airport.

We make a comfort stop along the motorway to grab some lunch. There, we get our first views of Black and Red Kites, Common Buzzard, Barn Swallows, White Storks and Cattle Egret.

Following, we stop at the wetlands of Arrocampo where we get a pair of Purple swamp-hens with a youngster, Zitting Cisticola, two Spoonbills, Little Egret and a Great White Heron. From the reed beds we can hear Savi's Warbler and a Little Bittern fly fast.

In the nearby fields, Lesser Kestrels hover and Pau finds a Purple Heron hiding in the reeds. Later, we move to the other part of the reserve and get Iberian Grey Shrike perch on a pylon. Griffon vultures soar close to us. Meanwhile, Susan finds a Scarce Swallowtail, Small Cooper and Red admiral butterflies.

Our next stop is just minutes away from Arrocampo. It is a new orchid reserve and what a place! The ground is covered by Naked man orchids and Champagne orchids, Pau finds three gorgeous Giant orchids (uncommon species in this area) followed by Woodcock orchids. Later, as we explore another plot of land, Beatrice finds Sawfly orchids with "resupination or flower inversion". Six different species in just a small plot of land! With no more time we drive to our Hotel in Trujillo.

Day 2. Monfragüe National Park

Today we head off to Monfragüe, one of the top raptor watching places in Europe. Our first stop is in Salto del Gitano, a huge cliff that overlooks the Tajo River. Griffon Vultures are all over the place as well as few Black Vultures. Crag martins are up and down and Cormorants fish down in the river. Pau hears a Rock Bunting that is located later by Matthew. We spot a Black Stork carrying some nest material and a Blue Rock Thrush sings from a rock on the cliff.

We drive few kilometres and before reaching the next stop a Red deer crosses the road in front of us. We stop at the River Tajo where we see hundreds of House Martin making their nests. Among there, Pau spots a Red-rumped Swallow and a far distant Alpine Swift. During a short walk, we find a Hawfinch and a Sardinian Warbler.

We stop at Villareal de San Carlos to use facilities and have a coffee. Pau also arranges dinner for that evening as we will try to locate the Eagle Owl at dusk. On the sky, a different silhouette catches our eye; it is a short-toed Eagle! On the nearby fields, Linnets, Serin and Corn Bunting feed on seeds.

We carry on along the river until next stop where we have lunch. This is a good spot for Bonelli's Eagle so we have lunch there. Pau gets an Egyptian Vulture being chased by a smaller

raptor that turns out to be an imm. Bonelli's Eagle, suddenly an adult Bonelli's and two more Egyptian Vultures turn out from nowhere!!! Great stuff!

We drop down along the river to Portilla del Tietar. There, among the bushes an early Subalpine Warbler is found by Pau and seen by everyone despite being playing hide and seek. A pair of Raven nests in the cliffs and a Nuthatch climbs up in a near oak tree. We walk back along the road waiting to see the "Queen" and not only we get views of Spanish Imperial Eagle but also a scarce bird in the area: a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Superb!

We go to Villareal de San Carlos to have dinner and wait until gets dark to try to spot the Eagle Owl. There is a rumour that the pair of Portilla del Tietar has moved to another area so we try another spot. We hear the bird but we are unable to see it. Later, we visit a small pool where we get nice views of Stripeless Tree Frog. On the way back to the hotel, a Wild boar runs in front of the car and several Common Toads are avoided on the road.

Day 3. Los Llanos and Belen

Once the breakfast is completed we stop in Trujillo to see the Lesser Kestrel colony. Then we move to Los Llanos seeing large numbers of Spanish Sparrows and Red-rumped Swallows nesting. Corn Bunting, Calandra Lark and Crested Lark are everywhere. As we drive, two big raptors get closer and closer, they are Spanish Imperial Eagles! Very quickly, we get off the car and enjoy for few minutes cracking views of these superb birds.

In the middle of a field there are 5 vultures resting on the ground (3 Griffon and 2 Black). In the opposite field, a Hen Harrier and Marsh Harrier fly towards us. Besides, Red and Black Kites are all over the place and Thekla Lark is spotted by Susan. We stop for a picnic in Magasca and get some common birds, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Tree Sparrows and Common Chiffchaff.

It's getting hot and reptiles are active as well as Large White butterflies. Pau finds a large Psammmodromus and a Spanish Terrapin sunbathing. There are also Iberian Water frogs croaking.

Our next stop is in Belen where we get a beautiful Great Spotted Cuckoo flying in front of the car. That is a good start! In a nearby field there are a group of 10 Great Bustard! Not far from them, there is a flock of 25 Golden Plovers. A pair of Egyptian Vultures and a pale morph Booted Eagle are also seen.

Today, we have dinner in the old town of Trujillo where we locate a Scops Owl and hear a Little Owl.

Day 4. Vegas Altas

Our first stop is in a "dehesa" close to Sierra Brava. Sadly, the first thing we find in the track is a death Ladder Snake. Lots of Hoopoes are feeding on the grass and on the wire we find a Woodchat Shrike. On the water, there are several gulls (Black-headed and Lesser Black backed) and 2 Greater Flamingos. Through the scope we can locate Pintails and Wigeons.

We take a diversion to look for some steppe birds, the road is quite busy so we press on and take a track where we find a solitary Great Bustard and a Stone Curlew. In a bush inside the

road ditch, Pau finds a male Dartford Warbler. As we drive back to the main road a flock of 20 Great Bustards fly over us. What a moment for Susan, her favourite bird!

Our next stop is to re-fuel the car and have some coffee. Pau spots a flock of Common Swifts feeding in a channel that goes around the town. At least 2 of them are Pallid Swifts! Then, we move to the paddy fields which are quite dry but along the edges we find a group of Red Avadavats. There are Common and Green Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilts and Yellow Wagtail in a small pool. On the grass there is a small party of Spotless Starlings.

A little further down, Tom sees a flock of birds landing. We pull over the car and get good views of Black-bellied Sandgrouses. Good! We follow the track and in another paddy field there is a Crane with two Storks! Hopefully the Crane can make its trip back north!

We get some information about a new reserve development, so we head off to get some more staff. There we find a pair of Egyptian Goose with two youngsters, a Night Heron, Greenshank, Showelers, Gadwalls and Little-ringed Plovers. As we turn around we get some close views of Iberian hare.

Day 5. Extremadura-Madrid airport

Today, is our last day in Extremadura so we decide to stop on Arrocampo for one last target; Black-winged Kite. We are lucky to find it in a pylon before reaching the reserve! Once we get in the reserve we see a Reed Warbler in the reeds and Crested Larks displaying. Tom finds our last bird, a solitary Garganey mixed in a flock of Gadwalls.

It is always a difficult thing to choose the highlight of the trip, but here we go.

Beatrice: The "Queen". The pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles flying so close. Superb views! Flowery meadows.

Tom: Cracking views of Bonelli's Eagle chasing/playing with the Egyptian Vultures.

Matthew: Spotted Cuckoo and Spanish Imperial Eagle.

Susan: The big flock of Great Bustards and the Spotless Tree Frog.

Some pictures of the trip in <http://birdwatchingspain.net/extremadura-wildlife-trip-report/>

Tour calendar <http://birdwatchingspain.net/birding-tour-calendar/>