

PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

SPAIN

2nd – 23rd May 2009

TOUR REPORT

LEADERS: CHRIS DOUGHTY and AUDREY BAKER

Following a long and exhausting flight from Australia we were met at Barcelona airport by Betsy and Kenton, two of the tour participants, from the U.S.A. and by Audrey our bilingual, local guide. As we walked to the hire car bay, we saw our first bird of the tour, the Common Swift; large numbers were wheeling around the airport building. Once we had settled in to our accommodation in Barcelona, we had lunch and then we spent the afternoon at the nearby Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve. On the open water we saw Little and Great Crested Grebes, Common Shelduck, Gadwall, Mallard, Common Pochard, Common Moorhen, Eurasian Coot and best of all, a few pairs of very beautiful Red-crested Pochards. Flying over the water were a few Sand Martins and large numbers of Barn Swallows. In the shallow margins of the lagoons there were several Grey Herons, an immature Black-crowned Night-Heron, a couple of Little Egrets, a Great Egret, a solitary Purple Swamphen, lots of Black-winged Stilts, a few Little Ringed Plovers, a solitary Common Ringed Plover, a couple of Little Stints, several Curlew Sandpipers, a couple of Ruffs, a few Common Redshanks, a couple of Common Greenshanks, a couple of Wood Sandpipers, a splendid Spotted Redshank in almost full breeding plumage, a solitary Common Sandpiper, a few Black-headed Gulls, several Yellow-legged Gulls, a few Caspian Terns and a good number of Whiskered Terns, a few Yellow and White Wagtails and a displaying Zitting Cisticola. The most exciting find, was several attractive Audouin's Gulls, they were even mating on a small island and it appeared that they were going to breed in the reserve, which they had never done before. In the extensive reedbeds we glimpsed the skulking Chetti's Warbler but best of all we enjoyed great looks at an adult male Little Bittern which flew right past us.

In wooded areas we found Common Woodpigeon, Eurasian Collared Dove, European Bee-eater, a Willow Warbler, a pair of Pied Flycatchers, Eurasian Magpie, Common Starling, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, European Goldfinch and European Serin. On the way back to our hotel, we stopped to use an automatic teller machine and while doing so, we enjoyed good looks at a pair of Common Blackbirds.

The following day was a travel day as we drove from Barcelona to Loarre. However, we had time to stop and look for birds on the way. Driving out of Barcelona we had a couple of Eurasian Jays fly across the road ahead of us. During a brief stop to use the amenities, we enjoyed good scope views of a rather fine Mistle Thrush. Continuing our journey, we saw a couple of Common Kestrels along the roadside, as well as Western Jackdaw and Carrion Crow. At one time we came to a screeching halt and admired a pair of Crested Larks. A quick stop along the Rio Segre, produced a pair of Mute Swans, at the extreme

southern edge of their range. A bridge over the river had dozens of Common House Martin nests and the birds were busily flying to and fro.

A detour along a road winding through farmland produced a flurry of new birds, which included Black Kite, Red-legged Partridge, Feral Pigeon, Alpine Swift, Eurasian Hoopoe, Calandra Lark, Black-eared Wheatear and lots of highly localised Spotless Starlings. However, the real prizes here, were a small flock of endangered Lesser Kestrels and a pair of stunning European Rollers. As we continued our drive we found good numbers of White Storks, feeding in the fields and nesting on churches, various other tall buildings and electricity pylons. We broke the long drive, with an afternoon birding stop at the Sarinena Lagoon. It proved to be a very good area for raptors and we enjoyed good long looks at many Eurasian Griffon Vultures, a couple of Egyptian Vultures, several Western Marsh- Harriers, a splendid Short-toed Eagle, hovering against the wind and a flying Peregrine Falcon. The lagoon itself held several Purple Herons and a solitary Black Tern, which was in full breeding plumage. The large expanse of reedbeds interspersed with tamarisks produced a fairly obliging Common Nightingale, several European and Great Reed-Warblers and I even saw a Bearded Reedling. Just outside Loarre, we added a superb Red Kite, a pair of Common Linnets and an obliging Corn Bunting.

We spent the morning birding Los Mallos de Riglos; part of the Sierra de Santo Domingo, where towering perpendicular cliffs dominate the village of Riglos. It is a very popular area with rock climbers; indeed, up to half a dozen teams, were patiently making their way up the steep cliff face. Shortly after leaving Loarre, we found a pair of Northern Wheatears along the roadside. On the towering cliffs we found Common Buzzard and Booted Eagle, many Eurasian Crag Martins were nesting in the rock crevices and small flocks of Red-billed Choughs flew around the tops of the rocky crags. Amongst the scree at the base of the cliffs, we found Black Redstart, Common Stonechat, Blue Rock-Thrush, Sardinian Warbler, Coal Tit, the very beautiful Woodchat Shrike and a superb male Cirl Bunting. In the afternoon we visited the spectacular Castle of Loarre, built in the 11th Century, by King Sancho III, who built the castle to defend his kingdom from the threat of invading Muslim armies, who were encroaching from the south. On the walls of the castle we found a couple of immature Rock Sparrows and in the surrounding pine plantations, we found Western Bonelli's Warbler, the diminutive Firecrest, Great Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Common Chaffinch, European Greenfinch and the attractive Rock Bunting.

The following day we drove from Loarre to Jaca, at the base of the beautiful Pyrenees Mountains. We broke the long drive with a birding stop at San Juan de La Pena, where we birded in the pine woodlands around the New Monastery and drove past the older, Royal Monastery; which is built into the side of a rock overhand, giving it a spectacular appearance. New birds for us included Grey Wagtail, European Robin, Blackcap, Blue Tit, Eurasian Nuthatch, Common Treecreeper and best of all a small flock of Common Crossbills, which included both adult males and females and many immatures, with their heavily streaked breasts.

We spent the next three days birding the picturesque alpine valleys of the high Pyrenees. In the mixed woodland of the lower slopes we enjoyed watching a dark morph European Honey Buzzard soaring overhead, a pair of Common Cuckoos chasing one another, a huge Black Woodpecker flying across the valley, a Winter Wren came out of hiding long enough for us to enjoy scope views of it, we found a Woodlark sitting in the middle of a track, we watched a super adult male Subalpine Warbler, as it flitted from bush to bush, sometimes climbing to the top of one of the bushes, allowing us to see it well and we enjoyed watching a small flock of four Citril Finches feeding on the ground in a small orchard. However, it was the spectacular ravines and deep gorges of the alpine areas of the Pyrenees that held the most interest for us and we were very well rewarded here for our efforts. Amongst the hordes of Eurasian Griffon Vultures, we managed to pick out a splendid Lammergeier and a Golden Eagle. Along a fast flowing mountain river, full of melt water from the snowfields higher upstream, we found a beautiful White-throated Dipper. But the great highlight here was a superb pair of Wallcreepers foraging on the steep cliffs of a rocky gorge. Other birds of particular interest included Water Pipit, Dunnock, Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, Common Chiffchaff, Crested Tit, Alpine Chough, Yellowhammer and Common Raven. We also saw a few interesting species of mammals here; these included Europe's largest species of deer, the Red Deer, a solitary Roe Deer, several Red Squirrels, some were red in colour, while others were almost black. We very much enjoyed watching a few Alpine Marmots, at the Astun Ski Resort and we were very pleased to find a small herd of Chamois grazing on the higher slopes of the mountains. One other feature of this area was the large numbers of pilgrims who were making the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia.

Descending from the beautiful Pyrenees Mountains we drove southwards onto the rolling steppe, to Fuentetodos, the birth place of Goya, for a three nights stay. We broke the long drive with a birding stop in the morning and one in the afternoon. The morning birding took place at Embalse de Sotonera, a very large reservoir. Although we saw nothing new at the reservoir itself, in the general area we did add European Turtle-Dove, the stunning Great Spotted Cuckoo and Skylark. We also found a Red Fox, which was standing on top of a stack of hay! A Brown Hare also popped up in this area. Our afternoon birding stop was at the Los Galachos Del Ebro, a nature reserve consisting of a series of oxbow lakes, in the meandering Ebro River. It was quite a birdy place and new birds here included Stock Dove, Melodious Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and the very beautiful Eurasian Golden Oriole. Best of all however, was a very uncommon European Penduline Tit.

The next two days were spent birding in the steppe country around Belchite. One of the features of this area was the splendid array of wild flowers growing along the roadside. We spent the first morning birding in the El Planeron Reserve, where our main target species was the elusive and endangered Dupont's Lark. Here we saw a beautiful male Montagu's Harrier and good numbers of Black-bellied Sandgrouse, but only in flight. Both Greater and Lesser Short-toed Larks proved to be plentiful and we scoped a solitary Southern Grey Shrike. However, try as we may we failed to find any sign of Dupont's Lark. In the afternoon we visited the La Lomanza Reserve, which has been created to help preserve the Dupont's Lark. Still no luck, not even, a calling bird. So we then

decided to pull out all the stops. The following morning we were back at La Lomanza Reserve; but this time we were in position at dawn, the only time of day that the Dupont's Lark performs its ariel display flight. Right on queue, at dawn, several Dupont's Larks began to sing their distinctive song. A bird then rose in the air in song flight, clearly silhouetted, with the planets of Mars and Venus in the background. We saw a second bird performing its display flight and as the sun rose, a third bird was observed by some members of the group, in good light. We spent the rest of the day birding in three different rocky canyons, where we were hopeful of finding the uncommon and very beautiful Black Wheatear. At the first canyon, not far from Fuendetodos, we enjoyed watching a fairly obliging Western Orphean Warbler. The second canyon, a little to the north of Belchite produced a very co-operative Tawny Pipit and finally, the third canyon, above Mediana, produced three splendid Black Wheatears. We saw one new mammal today, the European Rabbit.

The following day was very much a travel day, as we drove from Fuendetodos to the Sierra de Gredos, on the northwestern edge of Extremadura. The only new bird for the day was a striking pair of Red-rumped Swallows, which we admired along the roadside. We spent the next three nights, at a splendid hotel, which had once been the hunting lodge of the King of Spain!

Two full days birding in the magnificent Sierra de Gredos, was a real treat. On its broom-covered lower slopes we enjoyed flight views of both Northern Goshawk and Eurasian Sparrowhawk and a few Common Whitethroats sat up and sang for us. A walk amongst the more open, higher slopes, which were still partially covered in snow, produced great looks at both male and female Ortolan Buntings, several displaying, male Bluethroats performing their spectacular ariel song flights and best of all, a very close pair of Alpine Accentors. We were very pleased to find large numbers of Spanish Ibex on the highest tops of the mountains here. They were obviously used to seeing large numbers of people and many were grazing right next to the walking trail. If the adult males thought you had got too close to them, they would snort at you, which certainly got your attention! After dark, we found small numbers of Savi's Pipistrelles, a high altitude diminutive species of bat, flying around the eaves of our hotel.

The following day we drove into the heart of Extremadura, where we were based at a very old and traditional rural estate. New birds during the drive included small flocks of Cattle Egrets and numerous Azure-winged Magpies. We broke the long drive with a birding stop at the Embalse de Arrocampo; a large wetland area fed by the waters disgorged from a nearby nuclear power plant. The birding was very good here and birds new for the tour included Great Cormorant, Gull-billed and Little Terns, Common Kingfisher, Thekla Lark and Spanish Sparrow. We also had a couple of Common Voles run across the road, in front of our vehicle.

Extremadura is an unspoilt region of Spain where centuries-old traditional land usage and varied landscapes combine together to produce a diversity of habitats that is ideally suited to a good number of globally threatened species of birds. While birding in the dry rolling steppe, we found several Eurasian Black Vultures sitting in the farmland, several flocks

of a dozen or so Great Bustards and a splendid pair of Little Bustards. The male was strutting around on slightly raised ground, with his neck stretching into the air, highlighting the black and white pattern on his neck. The more somberly coloured female, was having none of it, and to all intents and purposes, remained aloof, having nothing to do with him. Although we were a hundred or so metres away from them, we could clearly here the males double raspberry display call! We enjoyed watching a few cryptically camouflaged Eurasian Stone-Curlews and following a great deal of searching we were very pleased to have four Pin-tailed Sandgrouse fly close by. Old disused farm buildings held diurnal Little Owls and one evening we caught a glimpse of a Red-necked Nightjar fly up from the middle of the highway and a pre-breakfast stroll through a very old olive grove produced a family party of Long-tailed Tits.

A visit to the Plaza Major in the medieval town of Trujillo, found us admiring flocks of Lesser Kestrels and a few Pallid Swifts.

We spent a very productive day in the beautiful Monfrague National Park, where the river Tajo and its tributary the Tietar, have cut deep and very steep gorges through the hillsides; providing perfect nesting sites for dozens of Eurasian Griffon Vultures. We also found much smaller numbers of nesting Black Storks and an adult Eurasian Eagle-Owl at its daytime roost site. We were also delighted to watch an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle clash talons with a Eurasian Black Vulture in mid-air. An adult Bonelli's Eagle flying directly overhead was an added bonus. While birding in the scrub-covered hills we found a pair of uncharacteristically obliging Dartford Warblers and a couple of Hawfinches flew overhead. While having dinner Betsy and Kenton enjoyed watching a House Mouse scurrying around in the dining room and a little late night spotlighting where we heard four species of owls, but saw none of them, did however produce a quick sighting of a Western Hedgehog.

Sadly, the tour had come to an end, all that remained was to drive back to Madrid Airport. We arranged an early breakfast, so that we could search for the rarely observed Savi's Warbler, at Embalse de Arrocampo, on our way to the airport. As we were scanning a large expanse of reedbed, Audrey's years of birding in Spain came to the fore, as she heard a Savi's Warbler giving its telltale reeling call. Now we knew that there was one calling deep inside the reedbed, all we had to do was stand and wait and pray that it came to the top of the reeds to sing! And that is exactly what the bird did, allowing us perfect looks at this inveterate skulker of the reedbeds. It was a fitting climax to a very enjoyable tour. Sadly, we bid farewell to Spain and Audrey having shared three weeks of very exciting birding together, on a very enjoyable and memorable tour.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

PODICIPEDIDAE

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Small numbers present on farm dams and some wetland areas.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Good numbers present on all the lakes, reservoirs and larger wetlands.

PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Michael saw one along a small river, during our drive to Loarre and we all enjoyed good scope views of a single bird at the Embalse de Arrocampo, near Almoraz, during our first visit there.

ARDEIDAE

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Regularly observed throughout all wetland areas.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Small numbers at all larger wetlands; plus large numbers present during both visits to Embalse de Arrocampo, near Almoraz.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Several birds observed throughout the tour, most were observed at Embalse de Arrocampo.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Small numbers present throughout most wetland areas.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Small flocks observed during our time in Extremadura.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* We saw an immature very well from one of the hides in Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, near Barcelona. A number of adult birds were disturbed by fishermen, during our first visit to the Embalse de Arrocampo.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* We enjoyed very good looks at this species firstly, at Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, near Barcelona, followed by even better looks, during both of our visits to the Embalse de Arrocampo.

CICONIIDAE

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* Great views at the crags in Monfrague, including one at a nest at Pena Falcon; they really do look prehistoric.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* One of the highlights of the tour was observing the many nesting White Storks. They seemed to occupy every church tower that was available, every abandoned building and none of us will ever forget the man made platforms they were nesting on, once again, in very large numbers.

ANATIDAE

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* We observed a pair very well, swimming around in the Rio Segre, close to Mequienza. This is the most southerly breeding colony of this species in Europe.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* This attractive species is not very common in Spain, fortunately good numbers were present in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, close to Barcelona, where we saw them very well. This was the only place we saw them on the tour.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* Small numbers breeding throughout most wetlands we visited.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* This common species occurs on even the smallest of wetlands throughout Spain.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* Small numbers of this very attractive species of

duck were observed very well in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, close to Barcelona. This was the only place we saw them on the tour.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* Small numbers of this species breed in Spain, we saw them on a number of wetlands.

ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* We were very fortunate to observe a dark morph of this uncommon species, circling overhead in a wooded valley, close to Atares, in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains.

Red Kite *Milvus Milvus* Far less numerous than the Black Kite, even so, we enjoyed good looks at this beautiful species, on most days of the tour.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Common and widespread.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* Michael picked out a single Lammergeier flying overhead in the upper reaches of the Hecho Valley, amongst a huge flock of Eurasian Griffon Vultures. We very much enjoyed watching it soaring above us, directly overhead.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* We regularly encountered small numbers of this species.

Eurasian Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus* During our visit to Monfrague National Park, we watched one of these birds clash talons with a Spanish Imperial Eagle, in mid-air, it was quite spectacular, they obviously did not like one another. We enjoyed even better views of several birds sitting on the ground in farmland, on the rolling Caceres- Trujillo steppes.

Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* In Spain this species is abundant, unfortunately, this is very much not the case, throughout the rest of its range. We very much enjoyed great looks at these birds nesting at various cliff sites in Monfrague National Park.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* Once again, this is a very common species in Spain, which is very much not the case throughout the rest of its range. We frequently encountered them throughout the tour, often hovering above farmland. Few raptors of this size have the ability to hover.

Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Small numbers observed at most wetland areas, they were particularly numerous at Sarinenea Lagoon, close to Sarinenea.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* Without doubt, one of the highlights of this tour was watching the many Montagu's Harriers we saw quartering farmland. We saw far more males than females or immatures and we were all surprised by how tame they were. Birds sitting on fence posts would often allow us to get very close to them in our vehicle.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* We observed an immature bird in flight on one occasion, on the lower slopes of the Sierra de Gredos.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* An adult bird was seen in flight, on the lower slopes of the Sierra de Gredos. Unfortunately, we were in our vehicles at the time, on a winding road and with cars immediately behind us, making it

impossible for us to stop.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Small numbers observed on almost a daily basis.

Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti* An adult bird was seen on two occasions flying above Pena Falcon, in Monfrague National Park. At one time it clashed talons, in mid air, with a Eurasian Black Vulture. Endemic to Spain, this species is classified as `vulnerable` in Threatened Birds of the World and it is estimated that there are approximately 160 pairs of birds left in the wild. The main threats to this species are habitat fragmentation as a result of deforestation for agriculture and timber and the main threat is from poisoning by humans. Between 1990 and 1999, 57 birds died from poisoning and this is thought to be the major cause of recent declines in the population.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* We enjoyed two good sightings of this uncommon species; the first bird was observed at high altitude, at the northern end of the Hecho Valley, at the same place where we saw the pair of Wallcreepers. The second bird was observed flying in a canyon behind Fuendetodos, where there were two Golden Eagle nests, both were built inside huge holes in cliffs.

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciatus* We were very fortunate to observe an adult of one of these uncommon birds, flying directly overhead in Monfrague National Park.

Booted Eagle *Aquila pennatus* This splendid, compact species of eagle, was observed on most days of the tour; pale morph birds greatly outnumbered dark morph birds.

FALCONIDAE

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* Our first sighting was of a party of a dozen or so birds, not far from Ballobar; later in the tour this species was observed daily on the Caceres-Trujillo steppes. We also enjoyed watching birds from the Plaza Major in Trujillo, as they flew around the beautifully preserved ancient churches, where they were nesting. This bird is classified as `vulnerable` in Threatened Birds of the World. The Lesser Kestrel has undergone a rapid decline in western Europe, equivalent to a 46% drop in every decade since 1950. It is estimated that its present population is between 50,000-60,000 birds and still declining. The main cause of this decline is habitat loss and degradation in its western Palearctic breeding grounds, as a result of agricultural intensification.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Far more common than the previous species; we saw the Common Kestrel on almost a daily basis.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* We enjoyed three separate sightings of this species throughout the tour.

PHASIANIDAE

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* This species was also seen on most days of the tour and is a very beautiful bird.

RALLIDAE

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* Small numbers observed in a number of the larger wetland areas.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Good numbers observed in most wetland areas.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* Once again, good numbers were observed in most wetland areas.

OTIDIDAE

Great Bustard *Otis tarda* During our time birding the Caceres-Trujillo steppes we found several parties of up to a dozen or so birds. It was marvelous to see them in their last stronghold in Europe. This bird is classified as 'vulnerable' in Threatened Birds of the World. The rapid change of land usage in eastern Europe, Russia and central Asia is expected to decrease the population of this species by more than 20% in the next ten years. It is estimated that its present population is between 31,000-37,000 birds and declining. Spain is now receiving large monetary grants from the European Economic Community and its vast expanse of rolling steppe is now also under threat from agricultural intensification, which we were able to see with our own eyes.

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* We were very fortunate to find a pair of birds on the Caceres-Trujillo steppes. The male was on a slightly raised piece of ground and was displaying to the female. He walked around with his neck extended, showing off the black-and-white patterning on his neck; the female is very somber in colouration and as usual, was paying no attention to the male, as he was strutting his stuff. Even though the birds were not particularly close, we could clearly hear the males 'raspberry' call.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Small numbers present in most wetland areas.

BURHINIDAE

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oediconemus* We managed to enjoy very good looks at a few pairs on the Caceres-Trujillo steppes. They are remarkably well camouflaged, which makes them difficult to find.

CHARADRIIDAE

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* One bird observed very well in the scope, on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. This bird was on passage from its wintering grounds in Africa, to its breeding grounds in northern Europe.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Small numbers breeding in a number of wetland areas.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* One bird in almost full breeding plumage was observed very well in the scope, on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta

- Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. This bird was on passage from its wintering grounds in Africa, to its breeding grounds in northern Europe.
- Common Redshank** *Tringa tetanus* Half a dozen or so birds in full breeding plumage, were present on their breeding grounds in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona.
- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* A few birds were seen well on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. A few were also observed on the second day of the tour at the Sarinena Lagoon, just outside Sarinena. These birds were on passage from their wintering grounds in Africa, to their breeding grounds in northern Europe.
- Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* A couple of birds were observed very well in the scope, on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. These birds were on passage from their wintering grounds in Africa, to their breeding grounds in northern Europe.
- Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Small numbers present on their breeding grounds along river banks and small numbers on passage, to breeding grounds farther north in Europe.
- Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* A few birds were observed very well in the scope, on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. These birds were on passage from their wintering grounds in Africa, to their breeding grounds in northern Europe.
- Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* We were very fortunate to find a small group of this uncommon passage migrant to Spain. A small party was observed very well in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. They were migrating from their wintering grounds in Africa, to their breeding grounds in northern Europe.
- Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* Three birds were observed very well in the scope, on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. These birds were on passage from their wintering grounds in Africa, to their breeding grounds in northern Europe.

LARIDAE

- Audouin's Gull** *Larus audouinii* This beautiful species of gull is restricted in range to coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea, with immatures and some adults,

wintering along the northwest coast of Africa. This species is one of those rare conservation success stories. Once considered endangered, numbers are slowly increasing, now that its breeding colonies are being protected. As recently as 1966 the total population of this species was estimated to be between 800-1,000 pairs. In 1993, the total population was estimated to be approximately 15,600 pairs in a total of 30 breeding colonies. It has only recently begun breeding in Spain, but now the bird's main breeding colony which consists of some 10,300 pairs, is found in the Ebro Delta, in northeastern Spain. We enjoyed super close looks at this attractive species while birding in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. We watched birds copulating and the local reserve rangers, were hopeful that birds would breed inside the reserve this year, for the first time ever.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* We observed this species along the coast and along the inland rivers.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* A few birds were seen well on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona and a few were also observed on the second day of the tour at the Sarinena Lagoon, just outside Sarinena.

STURNIDAE

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* An uncommon breeding species in Spain; we enjoyed very good looks at small numbers of this species during both of our visits to the Embalse de Arrocampo, at Almoraz.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* A few birds of this species were observed very well in the scope, on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. These birds were on passage from their wintering grounds in Africa, to their breeding grounds in northern Europe.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* A pair of birds in full breeding plumage were observed very well at the Embalse de Arrocampo, at Almoraz, during our first visit there.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* Small numbers in full breeding plumage, were observed on the first day of the tour in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* A solitary bird in full breeding plumage was observed very well at the Sarinena Lagoon, just outside Sarinena. In Spain this species is a summer visitor, breeding in very small numbers.

PTEROCLIDAE

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* We were very fortunate to watch a flock of four birds of this species, fly very close to us, while birding on the Caceres-Trujillo steppes.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* Good numbers observed well in flight during our time birding in the El Planeron Reserve, close to Belchite.

COLUMBIDAE

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* Seen almost daily, with the addition of some genuine Rock Doves at Mallos de Riglos.

Stock Pigeon *Columba oenas* A pair of birds were seen in flight at Los Galachos Del Ebro Reserve, not far from Zaragoza.

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* A very common species, which we saw almost daily.

European Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia turtur* We enjoyed occasional sightings of this beautiful species, including some good perched views.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Seen almost daily, mainly around towns and villages.

PSITTACIDAE

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus* This species has been introduced to Spain from southern South America. We saw a small flock fly in front of our vehicle, on the outskirts of Madrid, while driving to the airport.

CUCULIDAE

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* An uncommon summer visitor to Spain, which we saw very well on a number of occasions.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* Heard more often than seen, even so, we did enjoy a few very good sightings.

STRIGIDAE

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* Great spotting by Kathy allowed us to enjoy superb scope views of an adult Eurasian Eagle-Owl at its daytime roost, on the sheer cliffs of Portilla del Tietar, in Monfrague National Park.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* This species proved to be not uncommon, in daylight hours on the Caceres-Trujillo steppes. It was usually found perched on top of piles of rocks, old stone walls, or amongst derelict farm buildings.

CAPRIMULGIDAE

Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* One bird was observed in the middle of a major highway at San Clemente, unfortunately, only the people in the front of the bus were able to see it.

APODIDAE

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* We enjoyed good looks at small numbers of these uncommon summer visitors.

Common Swift *Apus apus* Seen almost daily, throughout the whole tour.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* A few birds were nesting under the eaves of buildings in the Plaza Major, in the centre of Trujillo.

ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Only observed at the Embalse de Arrocampo, at Almoraz, we saw one individual, on each of our two visits there.

MEROPIDAE

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* This exceptionally beautiful species of bird was observed almost daily throughout the tour.

CORACIIDAE

European Roller *Coracias garrulus* We very much enjoyed watching a pair of these beautiful birds in farmland close to the township of Ballobar. Later in the tour, we saw single birds fairly frequently, while birding the Caceres-Trujillo steppes.

UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Observed almost daily; they were particularly numerous around derelict farm buildings in Extremadura.

PICIDAE

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* This is a very uncommon species in Spain, where it is confined to the lower slopes of the Pyrenees mountains. Unfortunately, we only saw a bird in flight, as it flew across the Garcipollera Valley, not far from Jaca.

ALAUDIDAE

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* This large species of lark proved to be abundant in areas of the rolling steppe, the most common habitat in Spain.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* We enjoyed watching large numbers on the arid steppe of the El Planeron Reserve, near Belchite. We also observed a solitary bird very well on one occasion, on the steppe, near Trujillo.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens* Commonly encountered on the rolling steppes of the El Planeron Reserve, close to Belchite. We did not find them anywhere else.

Dupont's Lark *Chersophilus duponti* It took a pre-dawn, commando-style raid, in order for us to see this extremely range restricted and uncommon species. In the La Lomanza Reserve, near Belchite, we watched a few pairs doing their aerial display flights at dawn. Try as we may, we were unable to find them on the ground, during daylight hours.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* Seen almost daily; it was particularly numerous along the edge of roadways and tracks.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae* Small numbers observed daily in Extremadura.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* A few birds were observed well during the tour.

Sskylark *Alauda arvensis* Seen well on several occasions; it was particularly numerous at higher altitude, in the Sierra de Gredos.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* This summer visitor was observed in small numbers flying over wetland areas at Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, Sarinena Lagoon and Embalse de Arrocampo.

Eurasian Crag-Martin *Hirundo rupestris* Seen almost daily, we enjoyed many good close looks at this species of swallow.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* This very common summer visitor, was seen on almost a daily basis.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* Proved to be fairly common throughout Extremadura.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica* Another summer visitor which proved to be common throughout the whole tour.

MOTACILLIDAE

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* The nominate form *alba* was observed on almost a daily basis.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* Small numbers of the race *iberiae* were observed very well in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, near Barcelona and again in the Sierra de Gredos.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Small numbers present around high altitude mountain streams.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* An uncommon summer visitor to Spain; Michael and myself saw an individual at the canyon near Belchite and we all saw an individual in the Sierra de Gredos.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* Another uncommon summer visitor; we saw small flocks at the Astun Ski Resort, high in the Pyrenees mountains, as well as pairs holding territories, at higher altitudes in the Sierra de Gredos.

REGULIDAE

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus* We saw this diminutive species very well, on a number of occasions.

CINCLIDAE

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* We saw this species well in the upper reaches of the Hecho Valley and again on the upper slopes of the Sierra de Gredos.

TROGLODYTIDAE

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Small numbers seen well throughout the tour, including a particularly tame individual, in the grounds of our hotel in Extremadura.

PRUNELLIDAE

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* Some members of the group were rewarded following a strenuous walk at high altitude in the Sierra de Gredos, with very close looks at a pair of these birds, feeding right next to the track.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* Regularly recorded on the lower slopes of the Pyrenees mountains and then they became abundant, singing from the top of almost every bush, during the walk at high altitude in the Sierra de Gredos.

TURDIDAE

Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* This uncommon summer visitor was observed well, high in the Pyrenees mountains, in a canyon behind Fuendetodos and high in the Sierra de Gredos. We often saw it performing its aerial display flight.

Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius* We enjoyed several good sightings of this species throughout the tour; probably none better than the one at Pena Falcon, in Monfrague National Park.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* Seen almost daily throughout the tour.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* Seen well at various places, during the more wooded, first half of the tour.

CISTICOLDAE

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* Seen well on many occasions; including birds zitting around our heads, performing their aerial display flight.

SYLVIIDAE

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* Frequently heard and occasionally glimpsed in a number of wetland areas, throughout the tour.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* During our second visit to the Embalse de Arrocampo, our patience was rewarded with splendid views of this very uncommon bird sitting on top of the reeds, in full song. It was without doubt, one of the highlights of the tour.

European Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* Seen well at several of the wetlands we visited.

Great Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* A larger version of the previous species; it is somewhat more confiding and we were able to see it well, at a number of wetland sites.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* While attempting to find the Los Galachos Del Ebro Reserve, we stopped to have lunch at a picnic site, where we enjoyed our only sighting of this uncommon summer visitor.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* One bird was observed very well, on the first day of the tour, in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona. This bird was on passage from its wintering grounds in Africa, to its breeding grounds in northern Europe.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* This uncommon resident was observed well on two occasions; the first sighting occurred in the upper reaches of the Hecho Valley on the lower slopes of the Pyrenees mountains and the second sighting occurred in the Garcipollera Valley.

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* This uncommon summer visitor was observed very well on a number of occasions throughout the tour.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* Seen well in the pine plantation at the New Monastery, at San Juan De La Pena and some members of the group saw it again in Monfrague National Park

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* This uncommon summer visitor was observed

very well in dense bushy habitat, on the higher slopes of the Sierra de Gredos.

Western Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* Yet another uncommon summer visitor; we saw a bird deep in the canyon near Fuendetodos, followed by a second sighting from our vehicle as we drove through the lower slopes of the Sierra de Gredos.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* This summer visitor was seen well on a few occasions; without doubt, our best sighting was our first sighting, close to the village of Borau, on the ex-military road, on the lower slopes of the Pyrenees mountains.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* This uncommon resident was only observed on two occasions; firstly, in scrub at Mallos de Riglos and secondly, in Monfrague National Park.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* We saw this uncommon resident very well, but only on one occasion, while birding in Monfrague National Park.

MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* Surprisingly, we only observed this fairly common summer visitor, on one occasion. This occurred in the Los Galachos Del Ebro Reserve.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* We fared much better with this summer visitor; we saw both males and females very well, on several occasions.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* Seen well on a number of occasions, especially in woodlands of the lower Pyrenees mountains.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* Commonly heard throughout the tour and fortunately we were able to see it well, on several occasions.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* Super views of a few males of this beautiful species were enjoyed by all, while birding the upper slopes of the Sierra de Gredos.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* We enjoyed many good sightings throughout the tour.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola* Observed almost daily throughout the tour.

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura* Three splendid males of this very beautiful and uncommon species, were observed by some members of the group in a beautiful rocky canyon above Mediana.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* We enjoyed many good sightings of this summer visitor, throughout the tour. They were particularly numerous on the upper slopes of the Sierra de Gredos.

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* This charming bird was seen well on a number of occasions throughout the tour.

PARADOXORNITHIDAE

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus* Unfortunately, I was the only one to see this species, from one of the hides overlooking a dense reedbed, at Sarinena Lagoon.

AEGITHALIDAE

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* We saw a family party in an old olive grove, in the grounds of our hotel, the Finca Santa Marta, in San Clemente.

PARIDAE

Coal Tit *Pariparus ater* We enjoyed several good sightings throughout the tour.

Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus* We saw this species particularly well on the upper reaches of the Hecho Valley, on our way to the Wallcreeper spot. We saw it a second time, in the Garcipollera Valley.

Great Tit *Parus major* Observed almost daily throughout the tour.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* Small numbers encountered throughout the tour.

SITTIDAE

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* We first observed this species in the pine plantation at the New Monastery, at San Juan De La Pena. A second sighting of this species occurred in the Garcipollera Valley.

TICHODROMIDAE

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* We were extremely fortunate to observe a pair of birds feeding together on the almost vertical walls of a rocky gorge, on the higher slopes of the Hecho Valley, high in the Pyrenees mountains. This bird was voted bird of the trip by tour participants.



CERTHIIDAE

Common Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* This species only occurs in the north of Spain, where we saw it well on a few occasions.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* We also saw this closely related species very well, on a few occasions.

REMIZIDAE

Eurasian Penduline-Tit *Remiz pendulinus* This very uncommon species was observed by some members of the group, following a great deal of searching, in the Los Galachos Del Ebro Reserve.

ORIOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* This fairly common summer visitor, proved to be very flighty in Spain, which is not the case elsewhere in its range. It is flighty in Spain for good reason; it is a popular bird amongst the many bird shooters there.

LANIIDAE

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* It proved to be particularly common throughout Extremadura.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* We enjoyed many good looks at this particularly handsome species of shrike.

CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* We enjoyed several good sightings throughout the tour.

Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyana* This beautiful bird proved to be common throughout Extremadura, it also occurs in eastern China.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Seen on almost every day of the tour.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Seen well on a number of occasions during our time at high altitude, throughout the tour.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* Two huge flocks were observed at two separate ski resorts, high in the Pyrenees mountains.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* This highly localised species, was seen well on several occasions.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* Proved to be plentiful throughout the tour.

Common Raven *Corvus corax* This species was also common and widespread throughout the tour.

STURNIDAE

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* In Spain this widespread species only breeds in Catalan, in the extreme northeast of the country, but it does winter throughout Spain. We saw good numbers on the first day of the tour in the Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, just outside Barcelona.

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor* Commonly observed on every day of the tour, with the exception of day one, where it is replaced by the above species.

PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Observed almost daily throughout the tour.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* First observed at the Embalse de Arrocampo, near Almoraz; later in the tour, we went on to see hundreds, if not thousands, on the rolling plains, of the Caceres-Trujillo steppes.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Small flocks observed at Llobregat Delta Nature Reserve, Los Galachos Del Ebro Reserve and in Extremadura.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia* We enjoyed several scattered sightings throughout the tour.

ESTRILDIDAE

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava* This species of waxbill has been introduced to Spain from India. We saw small numbers at the Embalse de Arrocampo near Almaraz.

FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* Common and conspicuous, throughout the whole tour.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* We enjoyed three tightly packed flocks, throughout the tour, comprising of males, females and immatures.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* Commonly encountered throughout the whole tour.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* This beautiful species of finch proved to be extremely common, throughout the whole of Spain.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* This beautiful species also proved to be common throughout Spain, but is far more flighty, than the previous species.

European Serin *Serinus serinus* This also proved to be very common throughout Spain and its frantic jingling song formed a constant backdrop during much of our birding.

Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella* We were very fortunate to watch a small flock of four birds, feeding just metres away on the ground, in a small orchard, in the beautiful Garcipollera Valley, close to Jaca. This species has a very small world range.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* It was first seen by Betsy and Kenton in the grounds of our first hotel in Extremadura. This was followed by flight views in Monfrague National Park and an additional sighting in the grounds of our second hotel in Extremadura, in the village of San Clemente.

EMBERIZIDAE

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* In Spain, this beautiful species only occurs in the Pyrenees mountains. We saw it well, just prior to the hailstorm, in the upper reaches of the Hecho Valley and a second one was glimpsed at the Astun Ski Resort.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* Seen well on a few occasions throughout the tour.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* We enjoyed many good sightings of this handsome species.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* Great looks at this attractive species on the higher slopes of the Sierra de Gredos.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* Perhaps the commonest bird in Spain!

MAMMALS

- Western Hedgehog** *Erinaceus europeaeus* One seen briefly in the headlights of our vehicle, close to the village of San Clemente, in Extremadura.
- Savi's Pipistrelle** *Pipistellus savii* This high altitude speciality was observed flying around the eaves of our hotel, in the Sierra de Gredos.
- Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* One seen walking around on the top of a stack of hay! Followed by a second sighting of an individual which ran across the road in front of our vehicle, in Extremadura.
- Red Deer** *Cervus elaphus* Seen on a couple of occasions in the Garcipollera Valley and then again in Monfrague National Park.
- Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus* One individual was observed in woodland in the Hecho Valley.
- Chamois** *Rupicapra rupicapra* Small numbers of this very uncommon species were observed on the higher slopes of the Hecho Valley, while we were watching the Wallcreepers. Some of us enjoyed a closer sighting, amongst the snow, above the Astun Ski Resort.
- Spanish Ibex** *Capra pyrenaica* Without doubt, one of the highlights of the tour was getting up close and personal, with a huge herd of this species of wild goat. It was a great thrill to see the adults, juveniles and newly born animals, interacting together, on the upper slopes of the Sierra de Gredos.
- Red Squirrel** *Sciurus vulgaris* We enjoyed several sightings of this attractive species; most were red in colour, others, were almost black.
- Alpine Marmot** *Marmota marmota* Originally introduced to the Pyrenees mountains from the Swiss Alps, they have adapted well and their numbers are increasing on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees. We enjoyed watching them running on the ground and sunning themselves on huge boulders, at the Astun Ski Resort.
- Common Vole** *Microtus arvalis* A couple ran across the road in front of our vehicle at the Embalse de Arrocampo.
- House Mouse** *Mus musculus* Betsy and Kenton enjoyed watching one in the dining room of our hotel in Extremadura, while having dinner one evening!
- Brown Hare** *Lepus europaeus* A few showed well during the tour.
- European Rabbit** *Oryctolagus cuniculus* Small numbers present throughout the tour.