



## Birdwatching Holidays in Spain, Morocco & more...

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### BIRD HIGHLIGHTS

<b>TOUR</b> <b>Extremadura &amp; Gredos</b>	<b>DATES</b> <b>26th April to 3rd May 09</b>
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#### **Party:**

Brian Furness , Mary Furness, Ian Bedford, Janet Bell , Valerie Young , Neil Hutchin , Marjorie Hutchin , Jim Fowler

**Tour Leader : Josele J. Saiz**

**Total Number of Species : 138**

### Cumbria Birders in Spain

Eight birders from Cumbria (Brian and Mary Furness, Ian Bedford, Janet Bell, Valerie Young, Neil and Marjory Hutchin and Jim Fowler) spent a week in central Spain (26 April - 2 May 2009) enjoying a tour with the *Boletas Birdwatching Centre* wildlife tour group under the leadership of the director Josele Saiz. We were met by Josele at Madrid airport in the late afternoon and driven to our accommodation at Casa Arbillas, a lodge in the Gredos Mountains where we spent the first three nights.

Birding started around the lodge before breakfast with treats in store such as Serin, Golden Oriole, Short-toed Treecreeper and Firecrest. The day was spent exploring the forested foothills of the Gredos Range where perfumes from wild wood peonies, carpets of lavender and the ubiquitous *Cistus* flowers pervaded the atmosphere. Our bird list rapidly grew as species like Crested Tit, Woodlark, Bee-eater, Booted Eagle, Griffon Vulture, Dipper, Crag Martin, Subalpine and Melodious Warblers and Azurewinged Magpie were recorded, often set to a background chorus of Nightingale song. An afternoon excursion to the lower agricultural land around Cueva del Aquila produced White Storks, Woodchat Shrike, Red-rumped Swallow, Cirl and Corn Buntings and a group of three Black Storks circling overhead.

The second morning commenced rather cold and cloudy but we nevertheless pursued our itinerary with a drive to the alpine regions of the Gredos National Park, where the climax was a hike above the snow line to *La Plataforma*. En route we had our first good views of

Griffon Vultures, and found Blue Rock Thrush, Bonelli's Warbler, Red and Black Kites, and Crag Martins were everywhere. The hike up to *La Plata,forma* (by which time the sun was breaking through) was undoubtedly the highlight of the day with views of Common Dunnock (a montane species in Spain), Water Pipit, more Booted Eagles and a passage of hirundines (Swallows and Sand Martins) through the mountain passes. There was some debate as to whether the 'bird of the day' should be stunning views of a male Rock Thrush singing from a boulder in the sunshine, or close views of a male Bluethroat displaying. What a dilemma!

Other wildlife was in evidence too as we found Red Squirrel and, at higher altitude, we stopped the minibus to avoid squashing a rare Fire Salamander that was wending its way across the road! Its rarity may be appreciated as this was only the third that Josele had seen in his life! For mammal-lovers, groups of Spanish Mountain Ibex were closely encountered.

The third morning was time to say goodbye to the Gredos Mountains as we crossed the plains of the Tagus River towards Extremadura, allowing plenty of time for birding stops. At one spot near a stream it was hard to know which way to turn, with Red and Black Kites overhead, Woodchat and Southern Grey Shrikes, Golden Orioles, Hoopoes and Crested Larks all around. Nightingales, Cetti's Warblers, Turtle Doves, Cuckoo and a Wryneck formed a background chorus. Other sites along the route revealed Little and Cattle Egret, Little Grebe, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, and Lesser Kestrels.

As we crossed into Extremadura towards our destination at the Hotel Alcaudón in the village of Serrejón, we were alerted to be on the lookout for Black-shouldered Kite. At last we found a pair in good range which we observed for some time, including courtship and mating behavior.

Our first full day in Extremadura was spent exploring the north part of the Monfragüe National Park where the countryside is dominated by horizon-to-horizon forest of cork and holm oak trees, with a high biodiversity. Here we found Orphean and Sardinian Warblers, Azure-winged Magpies and Bee-eaters aplenty. It was perhaps in some of the mountain gorges with vertical rock faces that gave us the most spectacular sights. One site gave us Eagle Owl (at least, good views of the bottom half of the adult) with two well-grown chicks in full view. Circling overhead were dozens of Griffon Vultures, a few Black and Egyptian Vultures, and Black Storks (one incubating on a nest). At one point there came a shout from a birder: "Imperial Eagle!" and we obtained excellent views of this and a second bird as they circled around, rapidly gaining height in a thermal. Later we were able to obtain a brief view of one as it perched on a rock.

Even after the evening dinner, this excellent day's birding was not over, as Josele drove us along a country track in the dark where we were able to spot three Red-necked Nightjars as they were picked up in the headlights of the minibus.

The following day was an excursion to the south part of the Monfragüe National Park towards the steppes of Extremadura where the day's target was Bustards. We had not been long in the area before superb views were had of displaying Montagu's Harriers. As one of us was tracking a bird through binoculars there was a cry of "What's that?" and 'scopes were soon focused on a lone female Great Bustard! Later we penetrated deeper into the steppe area we encountered Thekla, Short-toed and Calandra Larks and, along a dusty farm track, we came closer to a larger group of Great Bustards, accompanied by a couple of Little Bustards. In all, over 50 Great Bustards were seen that day. Before turning for home, during a foray into the Cacaes Plain, many power-pylons were adorned with nest boxes which were variously attracted the interest of Rollers, Kestrels and Jackdaws.

Our final full day in Extremadura commenced in a wetland area where we had views

of Reed and Great Reed, Savi's and Cetti's Warbler, whilst Little and Cattle Egrets, Grey and Purple Herons, Kingfisher, Marsh Harrier and Gull-billed Terns were observed in flight. Scrutiny of the reed beds revealed a Black-crowned Night Heron, whilst a pair of Little Bitterns and a Purple Gallinule put in brief but clear appearances. Later we ascended to a plateau covered with dry lavender/broom heath-land where Dartford and Spectacled Warblers gave us good views.

As time was running out, there was one elusive species that Josele was keen to find for us and so we returned in late afternoon to a lay-by offering good views of rocky crags on both sides where we watched Black Vultures, Black Kites and Thekla Larks, until the call from Josele: "Sub-adult Bonelli's Eagle!". In fact a pair of birds appeared over the ridge and gave us sustained views of their aerial courtship display! What a fantastic end to the trip!

Ah, but it was not quite over yet! Driving back towards Serrejón, Josele suddenly pulled into a lay-by and we all jumped out to watch a pair of Black-eared Wheatears, a species that had failed to show up elsewhere during the week.

Before setting off for Madrid airport on our final morning, there was time after breakfast to return to the Eagle Owl location with the hope of spotting one the adults in full view. This was not to be, although the growing chicks were in fine display. Compensation was at hand as an Imperial Eagle was perched in the top of a tree across the valley giving a splendid and sustained view through 'scopes until it decided that the morning's thermals were strong enough for lift-off. This, we considered, was our cue to depart Extremadura. Even now, there were treats in store as en route to Madrid a pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse flew across the road ahead of the minibus, and a brief diversion along a farm track offered an excellent view of a pair of Stone Curlews.

There was unanimous agreement among the group that this had indeed been a superb week's birding (and other wildlife), with personal bird lists exceeding 130 species. We are all grateful to Josele for his expertise, energy and enthusiasm, and have no hesitation in recommending *Boletas* as a wildlife tour operator.

*Jim Fowler*

### Weather & Sites:

<b>Day 1 –</b>	Windy and Cold – Madrid to Gredos
<b>Day 2 –</b>	Sunny and cold – Gredos Mountains and Cueva del Aguila
<b>Day 3 –</b>	Cold with showers – Plataforma and Puerto del Pico
<b>Day 4 –</b>	Sunny and mild – Arbillas – Tietar Valley – Oropesa plains and Serrejón
<b>Day 5 –</b>	Cold , cloudy – North side of Monfrague National Park
<b>Day 6 –</b>	Nice and sunny - Aldea del Arzobispo – Santa Marta de Magasca – Caceres plains
<b>Day 7 –</b>	Warm and sunny – Arrocampo – Arroyo de la Vid – South Monfrague N. P.
<b>Day 8 –</b>	Warm and sunny – Monfrague – Calera y Chozas & Madrid

**h/Heard \*/ Seeing ad/ Adult juv/ Juvenile f/ Female m/Male ++ / Common (?) possible**

0	English Name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>				x		x		
2	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				x				
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				x	x	x	x	
4	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>						4		
5	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				x		x	1	x
6	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				10+			x	x
7	Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				1		1		
8	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>						2		
9	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	1	x	xx	x	xx	x	x	
10	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	3			5		5		x
11	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				x	x	x		x
12	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>						x		
13	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>					3+	4	3	2
14	Cinereous, Black or Monk Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				3	6+	10+	1	1
15	Eurasian Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		4	3	3+	5+	120+	50+	20+
16	European Honey-Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>				1				
17	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		1	1	2	1	3	1	
18	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans migras</i>			1	xx	xx	xx	x	x
19	Black-winged or shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>				2				
20	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciatus</i>							2	
21	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennatus</i>		3+	2	3		3	4	2
22	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>				1	2	1	1	1
23	Short-toed Snake-Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		2		1	2	2		2
24	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2	x	x	1	x	x	x
25	Western or Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>						1	2	1
26	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				1	10+	1		10+
27	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>						1		
28	Common or Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		x	x	x	1	x	x	x
29	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naummani</i>				xx		x		
30	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>						h	h	
31	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			2		x	x	x	x
32	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				x				
33	Red-knobbed or Crested Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>							1	
34	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				x		x	x	

35	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>						50+		
36	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>						3		
37	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				15+		3	2	1
38	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				3		2		
39	Common Sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>				2		1		
40	Eurasian Thick-knee or Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>								2
41	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>							2	
42	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>							5	
43	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>						h		
44	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>								2
45	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>					7			
46	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia feral</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
47	Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
48	European Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			2	1	1			
49	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>					2	3		
50	Common or Eurasian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		x	x	x	h	h	h	h
51	Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>					1+2			2
52	Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>					3			
53	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
54	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>						10+		
55	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					1	1	2	1
56	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		10+	xx	x	10+	10+		x
57	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>						12		
58	Eurasian or Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>				2	h	10+	h	x
59	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>			h					
60	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		h		h	1			
61	Eurasian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		1	h					
62	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>						xx		
63	Sky Lark or Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		2						
64	Wood Lark or Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		5+		1	x	x	x	
65	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>				xx	x	x	x	
66	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>					1	6	x	
67	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			1		1			
68	Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>		x	x	x	x	x		
69	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
70	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>		2	2	4	6+	10+		

71	Northern House-Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		
72	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>						200+		
73	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>			3					
74	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		1	x	x	x	x		
75	Blue-headed or Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>			3					
76	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		3+	1		1		1	
77	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>								
78	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator senator</i>		3		3	xx	xx	x	
79	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>			xx		4	4		
80	Hedge Accentor or Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			xx					
81	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinoides</i>						1		
82	Great Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>						2		
83	Eurasian Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>						2		
84	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				2		2	2	
85	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				h		h	1	
86	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>		2	h			1		
87	Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>				1		h		
88	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	h							
89	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	x	x	x	x		h		
90	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>					1	2	2	
91	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	2	h	1	1		3		
92	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>						4		
93	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>						4		
94	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			2					
95	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>		x	h	1		h		
96	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>						1		
97	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		x	x	x	x	x		
98	Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>			2					
99	Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			2		4		3	1
100	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			x					
101	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>							2	
102	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	2	x		h		h		
103	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		x	x	h				
104	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>			2					
105	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		h	h	h	1	h	2	2
106	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		1	h	h	2	1	1	







Pictures by Josele J. Saiz