



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

**BOLETAS Birdwatching centre**  
22192 Loporzano (Huesca) – Spain  
tel/fax 00 34 974 262027 or 01162 889318  
e.mail: [josele@boletas.org](mailto:josele@boletas.org) // [www.boletas.org](http://www.boletas.org)  
Esther Diago Millán - NIF 38493051K



**TOM GIBBONS**

**Independent Birding Trip Organiser**

37 Strawberry Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 6AQ  
Tel. +44(0)1625 520317 Email: [Tomgibbons2@AOL.com](mailto:Tomgibbons2@AOL.com)

Web-site - [www.gobirding.co.uk](http://www.gobirding.co.uk)

## SPANISH PYRENEES AND STEPPES

26 May - 2 June 2008

**TRIP LEADER:**  
**PRINCIPAL GUIDES:**

**Tom Gibbons**  
**Josele Saiz** -  
**Cristian Marcet** -

### GROUP MEMBERS

Sandra Baran	Wilmslow
Roger Benbow	Appleton, Warri ngton
Steve McGann	Wilmslow
Ann Ramsay	Hale Barns, Al trin cham
Sally Richardson	Leek
Bruce Richardson	Leek
Jane Wilkinson	Levens, nr Kendal
John Wilkinson	Levens, nr Kendal



## **DAY 1 – 26 MAY**

Day 1 was a complete washout due to a mechanical fault on our aircraft which meant a seven and a half hour delay before take-off and not getting to **Boletas Birdwatching Centre** until after 11.00 p.m.

## **DAY 2 – 27 MAY**

After our "late" breakfast, we headed up to the Loporzano Valley, but noting in the village before we left, Black Redstart, Serin and various hirundines.

On the short drive it was noticeable how common Corn Bunting were, their distinctive jangling calls seemingly everywhere. Spotless Starlings, too, were numerous, many with food in their bills. Rock Sparrow was soon recorded as was Woodlark. A pair of Red-legged Partridges flew across. Josele then heard a Western Orphean Warbler calling and after a little chasing, we all managed to get a view. While searching for the Orphean, a female Subalpine Warbler perched on a lower branch.

On arriving at the point overlooking the valley, Josele spotted on the rock-face opposite an Eagle Owl – he knew they were in the valley but had not managed to pinpoint one before. A Woodchat Shrike flitted about several trees and a European Bee-eater was seen on a dead tree, using it as a base to launch out for food. Griffon Vultures were very common gliding overhead and it didn't take too long before they were easily dismissed!! A raptor then appeared over the hill and headed high over us – a migrating Honey Buzzard. Crag Martins skirted the cliff faces and a Nightingale was briefly seen lower down the slope. A male Black-eared Wheatear was a handsome bird much appreciated by all. In the copse by the river below, several Golden Orioles moved through the trees, one especially giving a good scoped view. A couple of White Storks drifted high and away from us. A male Blue Rock Thrush was spotted and we watched as it carried food.

After lunch it was the Vadiello Dam and on the way a Common Buzzard perched on a tree. We saw our first Egyptian Vulture here and we compared it with the Griffons, which it flew with. Then, highly unusual for the area, a pair of Black Storks spiraled and then drifted away only to return at a lower height to give excellent views. A male Rock Thrush was an especially good bird to see.

Later in an area by the castle we saw Rock and Dartford Warblers, both eventually seen by everyone. After the disappointment of the previous day, this proved to be really good birding and we logged several of the area's specialities.

## **DAY 3 – 28 MAY**

We had a pre breakfast short walk outside the village and soon had both Red and Black Kites over-flying. Christian heard the call of a Melodious Warbler and we soon saw it flitting from branch to branch, certainly well enough for a positive I.D. Down by a flooded part of the track a Cetti's Warbler called several times but failed to put in an appearance. Then it was back for breakfast. Later we headed for a walk by the River Flumen but in some open country we had a close fly-past by a light phase Booted Eagle- a terrific view. Then a real prize in the form of a male Red-footed Falcon and later two females – there was an apparent influx of this species in Spain but still a rare sighting. By the river, Cetti's Warbler again called without showing but we did see a Reed Warbler and several Great Reed Warblers, with their raucous calls. Two Alpine Swifts then flew overhead and Josele picked out a nest of a Penduline Tit and after a short wait we had a lovely plumaged male continuing to bring back nesting material from the reed bed. Unfortunately for a few of the group, the mosquitoes were a bit aggressive here and left their mark!

Later, retracing our steps through the open country a buzzard caused much deliberation as a possible Rough-legged Buzzard until finally it was confirmed as a moulting Common Buzzard – a close call though!

Our next stop was the Castillo de Loarre where a couple of Red-billed Choughs were spotted flying over the castle. A Mistle Thrush and a Tawny Pipit were seen in the car park area. Then in one of the trees we saw a fine Rock Bunting with its distinctive head pattern followed quickly by a Western Bonelli's Warbler. A fine Rock Thrush posed atop a rock in the sun. In a slit in the castle wall, a Black Redstart was watched as it brought food to its young in a nest. Then we were all delighted to see a Firecrest and we watched it quite near as it sang its heart out.

A quick photo-stop at Riglos was followed by the sight of a Short-tailed Eagle and we saw it hover high over the valley, kestrel-like.

The final stop was the monastery at San Juan de la Peña and almost as we parked Ann saw a black bird fly through the trees – a Black Woodpecker. We set up our scopes and watched as it flew to its nest hole and fed, with the female, three chicks at the entrance – magic!! By comparison, after that, a Short-toed Treecreeper sadly caused little excitement.

The day's weather was very mixed and we had a few showers and a couple of thunderstorms passed by in the near distance but most of the rain was when we were driving and it did little to interrupt another great day's birding.

#### **DAY 4 – 29 MAY**

The weather forecast for today was very poor so we had a Plan B available but fortunately the forecasters were a bit adrift! Our target birds today were the higher altitude species and as the early morning mist lifted, we went to the Gabardito Refuge and started our walk up the trail. First were a couple of Coal Tits and a slightly surprising Common Treecreeper rather than the more usual Short-toed. As we looked down on a clearing, one of the key target birds drifted high above us – the Lammergeier. Despite the height its profile was unmistakable. Then Red-billed Choughs flew over and then a little later a group of fifteen Alpine Choughs called and flew above us.

As we reached the Wallcreeper site, we all settled down (lay down) to watch the cliff face above us for the number one target bird, for several, of the trip. Time drifted by and was relieved by the appearance of a Crested Tit. Suddenly Christian shouted "Wallcreeper" and we all scanned the cliff to get a brief view through the scopes before the bird disappeared. Fortunately it (another?) came back directly above us and we watched it, as its name suggests, creep up the cliff face. The walk back along the trail felt much easier having seen the Wallcreeper, albeit with our stiff necks!

After our picnic lunch at the Refuge we moved over to another valley and up to Lizara where there was the most beautiful alpine meadow to cross containing several different types of orchid, gentians, asphodels and hellebores and a host of other plants. But there were birds too, of course, including a lovely bright breeding plumaged Linnet. Overhead soared both Griffon and Egyptian Vultures and the occasional Lammergeier. Christian twice spotted a Golden Eagle including one as it perched on the mountain crest. We also saw several Chamois and a Marmot was also watched as it fed. A Kestrel caught a lizard and we watched as it returned to its mate and passed over to her. Overhead there was a flock of fifty Alpine Choughs and on the way back we had Red-backed Shrike and a soaring Goshawk our fifteenth raptor of the trip! Then just after we returned to the hotel, the rain started – so again we had a successful day and we rode our luck with the weather.

## **DAY 5 – 30 MAY**

We had a short pre breakfast walk in the village, listening to the wonderful birdsong across the countryside. Black Redstarts were common but feeding on a path was a Green Woodpecker. We had searched for Rock Bunting at several sites previously yet now here was one on the road in front of us right in the village! A Cirl Bunting was heard singing, then it came into view – a Red-backed Shrike was also noted.

After breakfast we went up the Anso valley, all the way to the French border through Roncal recording Honey Buzzard and Lammergeier on the way. Once there a Water Pipit was seen on top of a shrub and there were calls from several others. Numerous Alpine (Yellow-billed) Choughs flew along the mountainside. The second target bird (and the hardest) was the Alpine Accentor and after a false alarm caused by a “cousin” the Dunnock, one was spotted and scoped – a delightful bird. Then three Accentors were seen, in dispute? Our second Marmot appeared and it spread--eagled itself on the rock and watched us. We then searched for the third target of this high ground (c.1700 metres) and Christian found it, the Ring Ouzel. We watched it on the stone outcrop for some time, noting the paler plumage of this Alpestris race.

We returned down the mountain to have our lunch and there were Linnets and Citril Finch in the car park area.

In the afternoon we walked through a beautiful and somewhat atmospheric thick beech wood. Sadly, there was hardly a sight nor sound of any birds and the only “highlight” was that a Fire Salamander, its black and yellow colouring warning of its toxic potential. Anyway a rain shower curtailed the walk and we returned to the buses.

We stopped at Boca del Inferno (which years previously had been a reliable Wallcreeper site) where we had a Blackcap and then moved up the valley where we eventually got a Dipper. A Yellow Wagtail shone its bright yellow breast in the sun and three Honey Buzzards were high in the sky. On the way back to the hotel, those in the rear bus got a sighting of a soaring Golden Eagle, a fitting final bird from the Hecho Valley area, which we were to leave the next morning for the Steppes.

## **DAY 6 – 31 MAY**

We set off, in the rain, from the High Pyrenees to head for the Steppes, hoping to leave the rain as we headed south. Although we were to have a few dry spells, much of the day was rain affected, although we still managed to bird in between showers.

We made an early stop at Arres where we eventually managed to get a perched Ortolan Bunting so that everyone got a scoped view.

Apart from a coffee stop, where there were a pair of White Storks on a nest, we next stopped at a small wetland at Loreto. We saw a Golden Oriole fly to and fro and a Great Reed Warbler and Reed Warbler had a territorial dispute but there was only going to be one winner there.

We lunched at Boletas where close by we again had a Melodious Warbler. We moved to an almond plantation, checking whether the Eagle Owl was still occupying the cliff face opposite – it was! A Woodlark was on the ground beneath the trees and a Booted Eagle went over. A nest hole of a Wryneck was found and a brief view of a bird inside was obtained by some of the group.

We drove on towards Belchite passing Zaragoza where shortly afterwards there were numerous stork nests on posts, pylons and buildings.

Once at Belchite we headed onto the plains where it was still raining (the rain in Spain .....!!) and in fact here was thunder and lightning. Nevertheless we saw a Montagu's Harrier, a Black Kite and a Kestrel all flying close together.

We then had fantastic luck when a Dupont's Lark was seen walking among the grass tussocks close to the edge of the road and a few in the first van managed to get their binoculars onto it. There were larks everywhere including Calandra and both Great and Lesser Short-tailed. A pair of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse flew in and down behind a ridge. Then after trying for another Dupont's Lark, when the rain stopped, one called just behind us and we all got excellent views, finally, as it perched and then as it rose and descended back to the ground. We were about to pack up when Sally saw a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos.

On the way back to the hotel, we had a perched Little Owl on a rock and then a big surprise in the form of a Short-eared Owl, a very uncommon occurrence in this area. So despite a poor day weather-wise, we still managed some quality birds including the prize of at least two Dupont's Larks.

## **DAY 7 – 1 JUNE**

There was a short drive onto the plains where the main larks on view were Great Short-toed and Calandra, the latter particularly well seen. A Cattle Egret was by the side of the lake and was in good breeding plumage. A couple of foxes were also seen plus a number of Hoopoes and four Bee-eaters. One Black-bellied Sandgrouse took off from a flock of feral pigeons and later three were also seen flying away. A Little Owl was on an old building.

On the way to Bujaraloz we saw a Booted Eagle and Red-legged Partridge but this was the place where Josele's van came unstuck – or more precisely – stuck! The previous rain made some of the tracks very soft and Josele's van came to a sliding stop. A few of us managed to push the van through the clinging mud until it got a bit of grip and he managed to pull away. Rather than attempt a return, Josele went in a wide circle to return to the waiting group.

We stopped before lunch at Candasnos Unilla Wetland and this was a really good site with many waterfowl there. The pick were several Little Grebes and two Black-necked Grebes. Both Common and Red-crested Pochard were also present and Sally picked out a Purple Heron by the reeds. A Hobby hawked for dragonflies over the water and gave excellent views. Marsh Harriers quartered the reedbeds.

After lunch we returned to the Steppes to "mop up" the remaining Steppe birds. The birdsong was wonderful here, with a range of larks singing. A distant Southern Grey Shrike was the first of the trip and we stopped to identify an eagle – an adult Short-toed Eagle. A pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos were on the ground as the van approached, allowing excellent views and then they flew to a nearby tree. Two Rollers flew away from us, the blue colour being striking. Pairs of both Black-bellied and Pintail Sandgrouse were seen flying but we were unable to see them on the ground due to the length of the grass, too long because of the previous rains.

Walking past a small pool, the sharp eyes of Christian spotted a water snake – a Viperine – it was non-poisonous and a young one at about 15 inches. As it was held by Christian, it disgorged its last meal, a handful of tadpoles! It was placed back in the pool to join another.

We headed to an old farmhouse which we hoped would provide cover to allow us to find Sandgrouse on the ground, where we saw the area they had landed. Unfortunately, they saw us first and a group of four Pintail flew away. Just then a Stone Curlew called nearby, and as we walked closer, a pair flew away but at least the flight plumage was very apparent.

We headed off the plains with only Little Bustards outstanding from our targets but before we got very far, Josele stopped the van and pointed to two Little Bustards – in fact there were four, a male and female on the left with the male in display posture and two females on the right. Soon the male and female flew and were joined by the two other females. An excellent finish to the Steppe birding.

It only remained for us to return for our final meal in Spain, complete the checklists and then pack for the early departure the next morning.

However, as a group of us walked from the restaurant to the hotel, a Barn Owl crossed the street and dropped behind a row of houses – the final bird.

#### SUMMARY:

We had an unfortunate start to the trip because of the lengthy flight delay but the quality of the subsequent birding more than made up for the inconvenience. We had seen virtually all of the key birds we targeted from both the Steppes and the Mountains and also had been so impressed by the beauty and grandeur of the scenery. There had been so many highlights of the trip that when the Group chose their own, several different birding highlights were picked.

So another successful Pyrenees/Steppes trip and the key to this was undoubtedly the expertise of our two guides, Josele and Christian. Their birding skills, aural and visual, were extremely impressive and their local knowledge enable us to achieve the target birds in virtually every area we birded – they also developed a good rapport with all the group and certainly “made” the trip.

## **SPANISH PYRENEES AND STEPPES**

26 May - 2 June 2008

### Bird list:-

- **Great Crested Grebe - Podiceps cristatus**
- **Black necked Grebe – Podiceps nigricollis**
- **Little Grebe - Tachybaptus ruficollis**
- **Grey Heron - Ardea cinerea**
- **Purple Heron – Ardea purpurea**
- **Cattle Egret – Bubulcus ibis**
- **White Stork - Ciconia ciconia**
- **Black Stork – Ciconia nigra**
- **Mallard - Anas platyrhynchos**
- **Red crested Pochard – Netta rufina**
- **Common Pochard - Aythya ferina**
- **Egyptian Vulture - Neophron percnopterus**
- **Lammergeier - Gypaetus barbatus**

- Eurasian Griffon Vulture - *Gyps fulvus*
- European Honey-Buzzard - *Pernis apivorus*
- Red Kite - *Milvus milvus*
- Black Kite - *Milvus migrans*
- Booted Eagle - *Aquila pennatus*
- Golden Eagle - *Aquila chrysaetos*
- Short-toed Eagle - *Circaetus gallicus*
- Northern Goshawk – *Accipiter gentilis*
- Common Buzzard - *Buteo buteo*
- Eurasian Marsh Harrier - *Circus aeruginosus*
- Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
- Hobby *Falco subbuteo*
- Peregrine Falcon - *Falco peregrinus*
- Common Kestrel - *Falco tinnunculus*
- Red footed Falcon – *Falco vespertinus*
- Red-legged Partridge - *Alectoris rufa*
- Common Coot - *Fulica atra*
- Common Moorhen - *Gallinula chloropus*
- Little Bustard- *Tetrax tetrax*
- Black winged Stilt – *Himantopus himantopus*
- Little ringed Plover – *Charadrius dubius*
- Stone Curlew - *Burhinus oedicephalus*
- Black headed Gull – *Larus ridibundus*
- Yellow legged Gull – *Larus michahellis*
- Pin-tailed Sandgrouse - *Pterocles alchata*
- Black-bellied Sandgrouse - *Pterocles orientalis*
- Feral Pigeon - *Columba livia feral*
- Rock Dove – *Columba livia*
- Common Wood Pigeon - *Columba palumbus*
- Eurasian Collared Dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*
- European Turtle Dove - *Streptopelia turtur*
- Great Spotted Cuckoo - *Clamator glandarius*
- Eurasian Cuckoo - *Cuculus canorus*
- Barn Owl – *Tyto alba*
- Eurasian Eagle Owl- *Bubo bubo*
- Short eared Owl – *Asio flammeus*
- Little Owl - *Athene noctua*
- Common Swift - *Apus apus*
- Alpine Swift - *Apus melba*
- European Bee-eater - *Merops apiaster*
- Roller- *Coracias garrulus*
- Hoopoe - *Upupa epops*
- Eurasian Wryneck - *Jynx torquilla*
- Black Woodpecker - *Dryocopus martius*
- Great Spotted Woodpecker - *Dendrocopos major*
- Green Woodpecker - *Picus viridis*
- Calandra Lark - *Melanocorypha calandra*
- Skylark - *Alauda arvensis*
- Dupont's Lark - *Chersophilus duponti*
- Woodlark - *Lullula arborea*
- Crested Lark - *Galerida cristata*

- **Thekla Lark - *Galerida theklae***
- **Greater Short-toed Lark - *Calandrella brachydactyla***
- **Lesser Short-toed Lark - *Calandrella rufescens***
- **Eurasian Crag Martin - *Hirundo rupestris***
- **Barn Swallow - *Hirundo rustica***
- **Northern House Martin - *Delichon urbica***
- **Tawny Pipit - *Anthus campestris***
- **Water Pipit - *Anthus spinoletta***
- **White Wagtail - *Motacilla alba***
- **Grey Wagtail - *Motacilla cinerea***
- **Red-backed Shrike - *Lanius collurio***
- **Woodchat Shrike - *Lanius senator***
- **Southern Grey Shrike - *Lanius meridionalis***
- **Dunnock - *Prunella modularis***
- **Alpine Accentor- *Prunella collaris***
- **Great reed Warbler – *Acrocephalus arundinaceus***
- **Eurasian Reed Warbler – *Acrocephalus scirpaceus***
- **Zitting Cisticola – *Cisticola iuncidis***
- **Melodious Warbler - *Hippolais polyglotta***
- **Western Orphean Warbler - *Sylvia hortensis***
- **Blackcap - *Sylvia atricapilla***
- **Sardinian Warbler - *Sylvia melanocephala***
- **Subalpine Warbler - *Sylvia cantillans***
- **Spectacled Warbler - *Sylvia conspicillata***
- **Dartford Warbler - *Sylvia undata***
- **Western Bonelli's Warbler - *Phylloscopus bonelli***
- **Firecrest - *Regulus ignicapillus***
- **Spotted Flycatcher - *Muscicapa striata***
- **Common Stonechat - *Saxicola rubicola***
- **Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis***
- **Blue Rock Thrush - *Monticola solitarius***
- **Northern Wheatear - *Oenanthe oenanthe***
- **Black-eared Wheatear - *Oenanthe hispanica***
- **Black Wheatear - *Oenanthe leucura***
- **Black Redstart - *Phoenicurus ochruros***
- **European Robin - *Erithacus rubecula***
- **Common Nightingale - *Luscinia megarhynchos***
- **Mistle Thrush - *Turdus viscivorus***
- **Song Thrush - *Turdus philomelos***
- **Blackbird - *Turdus merula***
- **Ring ouzel- *Turdus torquatus alpestris***
- **Long tailed Tit – *Aegithalos caudatus***
- **Penduline Tit – *Remiz pendulinus***
- **Crested Tit - *Parus cristatus***
- **European Blue Tit - *Parus caeruleus***
- **Coal Tit - *Parus ater***
- **Great Tit - *Parus major***
- **Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria***
- **Eurasian Treecreeper - *Certhia familiaris***
- **Short-toed Treecreeper - *Certhia brachydactyla***
- **Dipper - *Cinclus cinclus***



- Eurasian Jay - *Garrulus glandarius*
- Eurasian Magpie - *Pica pica*
- Northern Raven - *Corvus corax*
- Carrion Crow - *Corvus corone*
- Eurasian Jackdaw - *Corvus monedula*
- Red-billed Chough - *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
- Alpine (Yellow billed) Chough - *Pyrrhocorax graculus*
- House Sparrow - *Passer domesticus*
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow - *Passer montanus*
- Spotless Starling - *Sturnus unicolor*
- Golden Oriole - *Oriolus oriolus*
- Chaffinch - *Fringilla coelebs*
- Eurasian Bullfinch - *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*
- European Serin - *Serinus serinus*
- Citril Finch - *Serinus citrinella*
- European Goldfinch - *Carduelis carduelis*
- European Greenfinch - *Carduelis chloris*
- Eurasian Linnet - *Carduelis cannabina*
- Rock Sparrow - *Petronia petronia*
- Corn Bunting - *Emberiza calandra*
- Cirl Bunting - *Emberiza cirlus*
- Yellowhammer - *Emberiza citrinella*
- Ortolan Bunting - *Emberiza hortulana*
- Rock Bunting – *Emberiza cia*

**TOTAL SPECIES SEEN = 139**

**The following 8 species were also heard:**

**Common Quail**  
**Water Rail**  
**Cetti's Warbler**  
**Garden Warbler**  
**Common Chiffchaff**  
**Goldcrest**  
**Marsh Tit**  
**Winter Wren**

**OTHER SIGHTINGS:-**

**Chamois**  
**Marmot**  
**Red Squirrel**  
**Red Fox**  
**Fire Salamander**  
**Viperine Water Snake**  
**Rabbit**  
**Oscellated Lizard**

**Several types of Orchid including—**

**Narrow leaved Orchid**

Elderflower Orchid ( purple and yellow versions)  
Burnt Orchid  
Early Purple  
Lady Orchid (and an 'albino' version)

