



Birdwatching Holidays in Spain, Morocco & more...

BOLETAS Birdwatching centre
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&

NEW HORIZONS UK

BIRD HIGHLIGHTS

TOUR Wallcreepers and Cranes	DATES Feb 19th to 26 th 2012
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Party:

Tour Leader : Josele J Saiz & Chris hall (New Horizons)

Total Number of Species 119

Weather & Sites:

Day 1 – 19.02.12	Cloudy & sunny Barcelona airport- Llobregat N.P – Finca San Miguel - Loporzano
Day 2 – 20.02.12	Nice and sunny Loporzano – Riglos - Villalangua - Sotonera
Day 3 – 21.02.12	Nice and sunny Astun Sky Resort- Villanua – Gracipollera - Piraces
Day 4 – 22.02.12	Nice & sunny Santa Cilia – Guara N.P. – Vadiello reservoir - Sotonera
Day 5 – 23.02.12	Nice and sunny Sotonera – Loarre – Montearagon – Loporzano - Piraces
Day 6 – 24.02.12	Nice & sunny Piraces – Ontiñena plains – Candasnos lake – Bujaraloz - Belchite
Day 7 – 25.02.12	Nice and warm Belchite – El Planeron – Embalse de las Torcas
Day 8 – 26.02.12	Nice and sunny Belchite Barcelona airport.

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	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		x		x	x			
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	x							
3	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	x	x				x		
4	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	x	x		x	x	x		
5	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	x							
6	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	x	x	x	x	x			
7	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	x					x		
8	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	x							
9	Comon Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	x							
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	x	x		x	x	x	x	
11	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	x							
12	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	x							
13	Ferruginus Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>						x		
14	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>						x		
15	Common Teal	<i>Anas Crecca</i>	x	x		x	x	x		
16	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	x	x		x	x	x		
17	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>					x	x		
18	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		x		x		x		
19	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	x					x		
20	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>		x			x	x		
21	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		x		x	x	x		
22	Lammergeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>			3	1				
	Eurasian Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
23	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
24	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	x		x			x	x	
25	Bonellis Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus Fasciatus</i>							x	
26	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
27	Western or Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	x	x			x	x	x	
28	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter GGtilis</i>							x	
29	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipier nisus</i>							x	
30	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		x		x				
31	Common or Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
32	Red legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		x	x	x		x		
33	Water Rail							x		
34	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	x							

35	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	x					xx		
36	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	7	xx		xx	xx			
37	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>						37		
38	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				x				
39	Great Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				x				
40	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	xx							
41	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x		
42	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>				x				
43	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				x				
44	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			x	x				
45	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	x							
46	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	x							
47	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	x	x		x	x	x		
48	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>						x		
49	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>						x		
50	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
51	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	x							
52	Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
53	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x	
54	Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>			3					
55	Little Owl	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		x			x			
56	Eurasian or Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>						x	x	
57	Green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			x					
58	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				x				
59	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>					x	x	x	
60	Sky Lark or Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		x			x	x		
61	Dupont's Lark	<i>Chersophilus duponti</i>							x	
62	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
63	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>						x	x	
64	Short-toed Lark	<i>Caladrella brachidactyla</i>						x		
65	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>							x	
66	Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>	x	x		x	x		x	
67	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>						x		
68	Twyn Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>						x		
69	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus apratensis</i>	x	x					x	
70	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

71	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				x			x		
72	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			x						
73	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>		x	x	x					
74	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h						x		
75	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>							x	x	
76	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		x		x	x	x	x	x	
77	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				x	x	x			
78	Common or Eurasian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	x					x	x		
79	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>			x	H					
80	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>				x			x	x	
81	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>		x				x			
82	Common Redstart	<i>Phenicurus phoenicurus</i>		x							
83	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>						x	x	x	
84	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
85	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		x	x	x					
86	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		x	x	x	x				
87	Eurasian or Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
88	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		x		x					
89	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			x						
90	Eurasian Penduline-Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	x						x		
91	European Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>		x	x			x			
92	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	x	x	x	x			x		
93	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>			x						
94	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>			x						
95	Wood Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			x						
96	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>		x							
97	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius Meridionalis</i>			x			x	x	x	
98	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		x	h					x	
99	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
100	Common or Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
101	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
102	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	x	x					x	x	
103	Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>			x						
104	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>			x	x			x		
105	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
106	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	x	x	x			x	x		



Pictures by John Southerland

Spain ~ Cranes & Wallcreepers 19th - 26th February 2012

It's 20th February at the Boletas Birdwatching Centre near Huesca, and the crisp dry early morning air is stirred by the whistles of Spotless Starlings and the bill clapping of White Storks, nesting on the church tower. After breakfast, Josele announces that he has received a call to say that we have an appointment with a Wallcreeper at 10.30am! By 10, we are starrng up at the spectacular towering salmon pink and grey conglomerate cliffs above Riglos, watching a pair of shrieking Peregrines gliding on a perfectly clear deep blue sky, while numerous Griffon Vultures soar silently by. Next, we find the Wallcreeper, at 10.27am precisely! I don't know how Josele did that, but as this charismatic bird busily flicks its moth like wings, while probing the cracks along the base of the cliffs for insects, with a delicately decurved beak, we lie back and enjoy the show for almost an hour! I even get it in the scope, for us to enjoy even closer views of this stone grey bird with blood red and charcoal wings. Support acts to this show stopper include Rock Dove, Crag Martin, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, and a trio of Alpine Accentors at very close range, while several hundred-strong skeins of Common Cranes, migrate north across the Pyrenees. Throughout the day, there was not a cloud in sight, and we also dipped on Citril Finch despite hearing it. After a break for afternoon tea, we visited the Sotonera reservoir, where we found a chunky Wild Cat, with a thick blunt ended tail, hunting out in the open. On the water, we saw numerous Great White Egrets, Yellow-legged Gulls and Red-crested Pochards and then at least a thousand Cranes appeared over the horizon in wave after wave coming ever closer on their way to roost at the reservoir. A memorable day indeed.

The sun shines again as we head north into the high Pyrenees to look for Snow Finch at the Astun ski resort on the border with France. With so little snow this year, we did not expect any more miracles from Josele, and as expected, the Snow Finches stayed too high to be found, although we did see Alpine Choughs, plenty of Coal Tits and a couple of handsome Chamois. Returning to the foothills, we call into a Quesería to supplement our picnic lunch in the sun, while looking down to a fast running river with Dippers. Josele offered a free beer to the first one to spot a Lammergeier above the range of craggy hills and said we would not leave until we had seen one. A flock of Choughs and dozens of Griffons soared back and forth along the ridge and I then spotted a Lammergeier briefly before it drifted behind the ridge. Better still Josele found one perched on top of a crag, with orange feathers ruffling in the breeze and so I never did see that beer he promised. Before leaving we also enjoyed stunning views of a lovely little Firecrest, flashing its bright orange crown like a beacon! In the afternoon in the woods near Villanua, things went completely 'tits'. As well as Green Woodpecker and Nuthatch we saw Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits as well as a very obliging 'Cresty'. Before dusk we staked out an Eagle Owl site in a dramatic 'badlands' landscape and soon after we arrived one appeared, but quickly disappeared on a hunting trip. Nearby we saw two more, one of which gave prolonged views in flight against the darkening sky, but we had better views of Venus, and Jupiter with four of its moons.

It's another gorgeous day, with perfect flying conditions for raptors. At Santa Cilia, there is a vulture feeding station, and as we walk up the track to it, they are already gathering overhead, as if waiting for one of us to drop down dead! Along the way, three Peregrines are tussling in mid air and we nail a Dartford Warbler on top of a bush. At the end of the track, we are met by the local 'friend of the Griffons', with heavy duty work gloves, two wheelbarrow loads of disgustingly pungent abattoir scraps, and an old jacket torn open by over-zealous vultures! As he leads the way with his barrow, more and more Griffons descend on a bare patch in the scrubby hillside, where the carrion is tipped once a fortnight. By now there is a mêlée of two to three hundred Griffons, jostling, hissing and squabbling over the discarded scraps, just a few yards in front of us! An amazing experience at such close range, and as the satiated Griffons

disperse, and we back off, Red Kites and Ravens swoop in to snatch small morsels. The finale is an adult Lammergeier, which spirals down from out of the blue, eventually soaring below us, and close enough for an eye level inspection of us, with orange eyes staring from a Lone Ranger style black mask, and with a clearly visible trailing 'goaty' beard. With a nine foot wingspan, what an awesome bird this is.

In the afternoon, we visit the impressively dramatic scenery above the Vadiello reservoir, and then return to Sotonera, hoping for Cranes. We are not disappointed, and stalk a gathering of easily five thousand plus of these magnificently elegant birds, packed so tightly on the ground, they are reminiscent of a human crowd at an open air rock festival. Next day, we can't resist another crack at the 'festival of Cranes', and so by 9.30am we are in a perfect position on a small hillock, with brilliant light behind us, looking across to at least 1600 Cranes, standing calmly and oblivious to our presence, as if waiting for the cool morning air to warm up and lift them over the Pyrenees and into France. Gradually small groups begin to take to the air, bugling evocatively as they go. From this watchpoint, we also spot Marsh Harrier, Southern Grey Shrike, Calandra Larks and a Fox. As we explore the area further we find Cirl and Corn Buntings as well as more large crowds of Cranes, and estimate that there must be around 12,000 here in total! Next we drive a short way north to visit the castle above Loarre. Although we only add Sparrowhawk to the list, it is well worth seeing the impressive fortified walls which surround this, the oldest intact castle in Spain, perched on a crag above the endless sprawling plain. After lunch here we move on to Montearagon Castle, where the parched rocky landscape looks like a scene from a spaghetti western. The site soon produces Dartford and Sardinian Warblers, followed by Raven, Red Kite, Griffon Vulture, Stonechat, Black Wheatear and Black Redstart, while a Little Owl watches the action from a ledge in the rocks.

Reluctantly today, we must say adios and gracias to Esther for all the lovely meals she prepared for us, as it is time to drive south to the steppes. Along the way, we cross the Rio Alcanadre and from the bridge we watch Cetti's Warbler, Blackcap, Grey Wagtail and a very showy Water Rail! In the plains of Los Monegros, we spot four Pin-tailed Sandgrouse within 100 yards of one side of the road and then four Black-bellied Sandgrouse on the other side, while a superb Calandra Lark sings from a nearby song post and a Hoopoe flies from bush to bush. We also scrutinise the boldly streaked breast of a Thekla Lark at close range, having already seen plenty of Crested Larks. What a shame to think that this super steppe habitat could be lost in the near future. Further on we stop the vans and pile out to watch a sub adult Golden Eagle circle above us on straight wings. After a picnic lunch, we visit a small lake near Candasnos, which is choc a bloc with water birds such as Great White Egrets, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Shoveller and Marsh Harrier, along with single drake Pintail and Ferruginous Duck, while Penduline Tits show very well in the adjacent reeds. Last stop before Belchite is Bujaraloz, where we find a gathering of 37 Great Bustards, on the outskirts of town, strutting majestically and at one point flying in a tight flock, before landing in view again. We have been so lucky with the birds and the weather again today.

On our last day in the field we must leave the hotel before dawn for 'Operation Dupont's Lark', as this is such a shy bird which only sings at dawn and dusk. Once at El Planeron, we dim the lights, open the windows and cruise slowly along the dirt track listening for a short whistling tune. We soon hear several singing just as the sky begins to lighten, and so everyone jumps out of the vans to form a tight group behind the scopes. One of the larks is particularly close, standing briefly on the edge of a side track for a quick look in the scope, before weaving almost invisibly in and out of the short grassy tussocks. Despite the apparent lack of cover the bird eludes us and, as the sun rises a deep red, the singing dies away. Somehow, John manages to capture a rare shot of this slippery escape artist! Meanwhile, Lesser Short-toed Larks and Rock Sparrows are far more obliging here.

Next we drive to the Embalse de las Torcas, where Josele announces lunch and Bonelli's

Eagle, and within minutes he spots one and then a second, soaring above one of the peaks! Soon after, we spot a Golden Eagle, while one of the Bonelli's Eagles settles on a rocky perch, and sits for fabulous views in the scope. Five Ibex saunter by in the valley below, while another Golden Eagle appears, making spectacular dives to advertise ownership of the territory, and then a Goshawk gets mobbed by a far smaller Sparrowhawk! What a great way to conclude this fabulous birding trip. Well done Josele.

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