

Extremadura in Spring - A Beginner Birdwatching Tour

Naturetrek Tour Report

1 - 7 May 2014



Great Bustard



Little Bustard



Great Egret & Purple Heron



European Roller

Report & images compiled by Tom Mabbett



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Pat Currie
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Summary

A fantastic week spent exploring all the habitats that the stunning region of Extremadura has to offer. The aim was not only to see all the star birds but also to really study them and learn their key identification points. It was a very successful week with simply stunning views of a whole host of special species with glorious early spring weather

Day 1

Thursday 1st May

I met the group today at Madrid airport and we travelled for around 3hrs to our hotel a few miles south of the rural town of Trujillo at Vina Las Torres. We had our first taste of foreign birding en-route with White Storks and Black Kites over the van. Arriving at around 6.30 we had time for a quick orientation and went for a short walk from the hotel. There is some superb birding on the doorstep here so we enjoyed the Azure-winged Magpies, Woodchat Shrike and Serin and had the nice surprise with a flyover Egyptian Vulture! After getting to grips with a few classic species we enjoyed our first delicious dinner.

Day 2

Friday 2nd May

After a great breakfast we headed out at 8.15 to explore the classic Extremadura Steppe. Travelling towards the town of Santa Marta de Magasca we stopped to watch a male Little Bustard displaying with Crested Larks all around us. Checking a small pool of water proved very successful as a Black-bellied Sandgrouse flew in and landed to allow excellent scoped views. Two others flew treating us to their amazing bubbling flight call. A Little Ringed Plover was also seen here.

Continuing we were delighted to spot a lone male Great Bustard seemingly displaying on his own and four Pintailed Sandgrouse flew over with their distinct flight call and profile. We took the time to study the many Calandra Larks and a stunning male Montagu's Harrier gave a very nice flyby while two Short-toed Larks gave amazing close views by the side of the van! We had a really stunning start and went to enjoy a well-earned cup of tea in the quaint town of Santa Marta de Magasca, while Steve T went for an exploration around the town.

Feeling refreshed we continued on and on a short walk had a further three Great Bustard in flight with a Whinchat on roadside wires. We stopped at a picturesque riverside spot for lunch and enjoyed superb views of a cracking juvenile Kingfisher with the tiny white-tip clear through the scope. Not too far through the town and we were soon studying another gorgeous bird. This time a pair of Rollers was very close to the roadside. They really are a special bird and we took time to enjoy them.

Moving on we then had the spectacle of around six Montagu's Harriers together in the sky with Black Vultures giving stunning flybys with the more common Griffon Vultures for comparison. After an amazing first day exploring this bird rich area we turned for home after watching Iberian Grey Shrikes and enjoying the Lesser Kestrels around the town's old bullring where they nest. We had some time to relax before another home cooked dinner.

Day 3

Saturday 3rd May

Today we travelled to a totally different habitat and explored the superb wetland habitat at Arrocampo Reservoir. After getting the keys for the hides we spent time at hide One with Purple Herons flying over and good views of Great-Reed Warbler while Savi's Warbler were reeling around us. We then took a nice walk out to hide 2 and on the way stopped for excellent views of a juvenile Night Heron. From around the next hide we watched Gull-billed Tern and Little Tern and were surprised to see 3 Ferruginous Duck on the water with a couple of Gadwall. We enjoyed a flock of Cattle Egret with some feeding off the back of the large white cattle that were nearby and Stonechats were regularly seen.

After an excellent morning we went for a coffee stop while Steve T again went for a quick look around town. Moving on to a new area for lunch and near a shallow lagoon we had superb views of Black-winged Stilt and a small Bee-eater colony low in a sand bank allowed us to really enjoy these colourful birds at close range. We enjoyed this lively spot over lunch.

We carried on birding at the final two hides in the afternoon and had superb views of Cetti's Warbler and 4 Purple Swamphen eventually showed very well for us with Great White Egret dropping in. Excitement then ensued as Steve C did very well to spot an Osprey flying right over our heads before gaining height and drifting away! We finished the day back at hide one and here, with lots of reed margins, we had our best chance of Little Bittern. After a bit of a wait and some our patience and field craft paid off as we stood holding our breath as a stunning male bird walked out on an overhanging reed giving us a simply superb end to a fantastic days wetland birding.

We returned to the hotel for dinner and afterwards drove to a local town, and although tracking a Scops Owl to a single large mast unfortunately we just could not see it! Everyone certainly had learnt the call by the time we gave in and headed back.

Day 4

Sunday 4th May

Today we headed back out into steppe habitat and an area very popular with Great Spotted Cuckoo. We headed out along the very bumpy and narrow dirt track and soon pulled over for a wander in the morning sun. As we got out of the van two Stone Curlews flew up and gave a very nice flyby and Quail were singing with an impressive Black Vulture perched next to a Griffon for an excellent comparison. We continued to scan for whatever we could find here and Jan did very well to spot our main target as a striking Great Spotted Cuckoo was sat on wires across the field. Having evidently got her eye in Jan then spotted a lone Great Bustard striding across the hillside! After some excellent birding here we continued on and soon stopped again for an extremely obliging Little Owl and 3 very smart Whinchat.

A walk across a couple of fields led to another gorgeous Little Owl just a few meters from us with Crested and Calandra Lark overhead while Steve and Karen watched Bee-eaters around a nearby stream. It was starting to really warm up now and we went into the town of Madronera for a coffee break and some shade. There were some very nice Pallid Swifts flying low in good light here which gave us the chance to try and get to grips with this tricky species.

After a relaxed lunch in the grounds of the hotel we spent the afternoon exploring to the south. This is the agricultural area where a lot of rice is grown and famous for the cranes in the winter. We stopped off near a sheltered pool and watched Pied and Spotted Flycatcher here with Spanish Sparrows, and a short distance on near the town of Madralejo watched a Little Ringed Plover, Purple Heron and a flock of Red Avadavat. The pools here were attracting a lot of birds and an exciting bird here was a Collared Pratincole which flew over calling loudly but unfortunately headed off at height giving only the briefest of views. We drove on around the rice fields and despite all of them being very dry we had some excellent sightings around a disused railway with Rollers showing very well indeed and a perched Short-toed Eagle was a real highlight here allowing us to study this impressive bird.

Before returning to our hotel we travelled a short distance along the road leading to Campo Lugar and again had a real treat as Pat did well to spot 8 Great Bustard together on the horizon across a nearby field. We all jumped out and had excellent views of these impressive birds. Delighted with our days birding we headed for the hotel but not before Karen spotted yet another Great Bustard! We had time to relax before dinner at the hotel while Steve T tried in vain once more to spot the elusive Nightingale that had been singing in the garden all week!

Day 5

Monday 5th May

We were up early today for our much anticipated visit to Monfragüe National Park. Around an hour north of Trujillo this was to be our longest day but we needed this time with so much to see here. After a nice drive we made our first stop at Pena Falcon and spent some time here watching the hundreds of vultures taking to the skies. Being able to watch birds on their nests here is a really special experience and we soon spotted a Black Storks nest tucked away in a crag. A smart Rock Bunting was feeding on seed just in front of us while Black Redstarts and Blue Rock Thrush were singing in the morning sun. Two Bonelli's Eagles came out of nowhere drifting across the valley. Although at height, it was still great to see these birds. A pair of Peregrine Falcons was also stooping overhead being very vocal and Steve T did well to pick one out perched on the crag allowing very good scoped views

Dragging ourselves away from here we drove a short distance on, stopping at a huge House Martin colony under a bridge. Alpine Swifts also breed here and we watched 4-6 birds zipping around over the river. After a well-deserved coffee/ice cream stop we walked in a very nice area of more scrubby vegetation. Here with a bit of patience we had excellent views of a stunning male Black-eared Wheatear, Dartford Warblers and studied a Thekla Lark learning the differences between the very similar Crested Lark.

Lunch was taken overlooking the river and after Jan pointed out some Red Deer we had the bonus of a Subalpine Warbler working the bushes next to the picnic benches.

An area of pine woodland was again a different habitat for us to explore and in a short time we saw Short-toed Treecreeper, Spotted Flycatcher and another Rock Bunting.

We continued on our way stopping to watch a stunning Egyptian Vulture on its nest before going for a walk in another classic habitat, the cork oak dehesa. We avoided the heat of the day here by sheltering in the shade of these impressive cork oaks and listened to Golden Orioles singing all around us. We did manage to glimpse at least three birds in flight on numerous occasions but watching them perched proved very difficult indeed. There were two Cuckoos here with Nuthatch a new bird for the week.

After a nice stroll we headed for our final point of call at a viewpoint looking over another impressive crag at Port el Tietar. Here the mighty Spanish Imperial Eagle nests, and this year they were nesting very close by! We relaxed in the shelter of the hide here, watching the comings and goings of the Griffon Vultures and we all managed good views of a lovely Eagle Owl chick which was occasionally moving into view! As if out of nowhere and after quite some time both Spanish Imperial Eagles stooped into the nest and while one bird left quite quickly, the other could actually be seen carefully feeding its young! We felt privileged to be watching this very rare raptor and as they flew up in front of the crag we could all clearly see the diagnostic white leading edge to the wings of this huge bird. It was a super end to a real bird-filled day and we made our way back to the hotel safely in time for another home cooked dinner.

Day 6

Tuesday 6th May

Today was our last full day in Extremadura and we covered some areas we had previously visited to try and gain closer views of some star species and simply enjoy and take in the area. We started with a nice walk out onto the plains again to soak up this most iconic of habitats and enjoyed simply stunning views of a displaying Little Bustard. We spent time enjoying the bustard, with Montagu's Harriers over the fields and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse calling as they flew overhead. A Tawny Pipit was on the path not too far in front of us and showed well on a fence post. We continued on a short distance and finished our time in this wonderful habitat watching a male Great Bustard displaying to two female birds after a Booted Eagle has showed very well on a roadside post.

No visit to this region is complete without exploring the medieval town of Trujillo so we had our daily coffee stop here today. We walked the streets and around the square and paused to watch the nesting White Storks, Lesser Kestrels and some Pallid Swifts nesting behind some low guttering. After enjoying the town we again headed back to the hotel and enjoyed lunch and had some free time now to either watch the birds around the hotel grounds or just relax in the garden. Steve T and I went to explore behind the hotel and noticed Spanish Festoon butterflies on the wing along with Marsh Fritillaries and a Broad-bodied Chaser was also noted. Again we tried to see the Nightingale and actually managed to glimpse it this time before it returned to cover.

After a relaxing afternoon and with temperatures dropping off we all went out for a drive not far from the hotel and again had excellent views of Great Spotted Cuckoo. Two birds were this time much closer to the road giving excellent views and we spent time enjoying the birds and our surroundings with Stonechats all around us, Corn Bunting, Hoopoes and a single Yellow Wagtail. We returned in good time for dinner and to reflect on the weeks birding and have a vote for the bird of the week for which votes included Great Spotted Cuckoo, Rollers and Spanish Imperial Eagle.

Day 7

Wednesday 7th May

Today we had to make our way to the airport so after breakfast we said farewell to our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen and also to Steve T who was staying on to visit Caceres nearby.

We were soon on our way and as we were making good time we stopped for a 20 minute scan around Arrocampo again in the hope of Black-shouldered Kite, one of the few we had missed. There is always one that gets away and we weren't able to spot this bird before continuing our journey back to Madrid.

It was a very smooth journey and we were soon saying our farewells after a fantastic week of European birding.

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Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓						
2	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>			H					
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓				
4	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			✓					
5	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>			✓					
6	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				H			✓	
7	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓					
8	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>						✓		
9	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>			✓					
11	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			✓					
12	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			✓					
13	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
14	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓			
15	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>			✓	✓				
16	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓					
17	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓					
18	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓					
19	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓						
20	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	✓				✓			
22	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
23	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
24	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			✓					
25	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	✓			✓				
26	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
27	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		✓					✓	
28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓		
29	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>					✓			
30	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>					✓			
31	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	
32	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		✓					✓	
33	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓	✓				
34	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>					✓			
35	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		✓		✓			✓	
36	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>		✓					✓	
37	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>			✓					
38	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓	✓				
39	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	✓				
40	Eurasian Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemos</i>				✓				
41	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			✓	✓				
42	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		✓		✓				
43	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓	✓				
44	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>				✓				
45	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>			✓					
46	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>			✓					
47	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>		✓					✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
48	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		✓						
49	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
50	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
51	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			✓	✓	✓			
52	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
53	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>				✓			✓	
54	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	H	✓	H	H	✓		H	
55	Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>						✓		
56	Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>	H		H	H				
57	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				✓				
58	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>						✓		
59	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>					✓		✓	✓
61	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>		✓			✓			
62	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
63	European Bee-Eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
64	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
66	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	H		H			✓		
68	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>						✓		
69	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
71	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓				✓	✓	✓
72	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
74	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>					✓	✓		
75	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓			✓			
76	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>		✓						
77	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
78	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>					✓	✓		
79	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			✓					
80	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
81	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓				✓		
82	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓	✓	✓			✓
83	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
84	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			✓	✓	✓			
85	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>						✓		
86	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			✓					✓
87	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>			✓	✓				
88	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			✓					
89	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>			H					
90	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			✓	✓				
91	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>					✓			
92	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>						✓		
93	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>					✓	✓		
94	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	H	✓	✓					H
95	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>					✓			
96	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>					✓	✓		
97	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	✓	H			H		
98	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>						✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	May							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
99	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		✓	✓			✓		
100	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
102	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	H	H	H	H	✓	✓		
103	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>						✓		
104	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
105	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			✓	✓			✓	
106	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓		✓				
107	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>						✓		
108	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>						✓		
109	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
110	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	✓			✓				
111	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			✓					
112	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>				✓				
113	Yellow (Iberian) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava (iberiae)</i>			✓				✓	
114	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓						
115	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				✓	✓			
116	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>							✓	
117	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓				✓		
118	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
119	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓		✓			
120	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
121	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>						✓	✓	
122	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	✓	✓						
123	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
124	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>						✓		

Other Taxa

Rabbit, *Lepus curpaeums*

Marsh Frog, *Pelophylax ridibundus*

Large Psammodromus, *Psammodromus algirus*

Spanish Festoon, *Zerynthia rumina*

Spanish Marbled White, *Melanargia ines*

Red Deer, *Cervus elaphus*

Spanish Terrapin, *Mauremys leprosa*

Common Toad, *Bufo Bufo*

Marsh Fritillary, *Euphydryas aurinia*

Broad-bodied Chaser, *Libellula depressa*