



Extremadura, Spain

Dates: 27th April – 3rd May 2019



This exciting new tour is timed so that we have the best chance of catching both the bustards in display as well as the majority of the summer visitors fresh in from Africa. Early morning visits to the plains should allow us close encounters with Great and Little Bustards as well as both Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse as well as masses of Calandra Larks. The plains are also home to Montagu's Harrier which nest semi-colonially and should be back in good numbers in time for our visit. Monfrague National Park also lies within easy reach of our base and is home to large numbers of nesting raptors. A visit to the castle in the morning provides superb opportunities to see vultures up close as they catch the early morning thermals from their roost sites. Griffon Vultures are virtually everywhere whilst Black Vultures are found in higher concentrations here than anywhere else in the World. Egyptian Vultures also occur and we're sure to pick them up at some point whilst in the park. The area is also home to the Spanish Imperial Eagle and Black Stork which can be found nesting on rocky outcrops visible from the road. Raptors are indeed everywhere and are a real feature of the trip with up to 18 species expected. It's not all big birds though and colourful passerines such as Bee-eater, Roller, Subalpine Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Hawfinch and Cirl Bunting should also be seen during the week.

By contrast we'll also be visiting a wetland site which although man made is an excellent location for picking up otherwise rare birds within the province. Arrocampo Reservoir is home to Little Bittern, Purple Heron, Purple Gallinule, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Gull-billed Tern and a whole host of other species associated with wetland habitats. It's also close to a great site for orchids and we'll spend a couple of hours looking around the groves for any specialities that might be in flower

at the time. It also provides the more birdy minded amongst the group an opportunity to connect with Booted Eagle and perhaps a passing Short-toed Eagle.



Although this is not a photographic holiday there will be many opportunities to capture images as the pace is slow, the wildlife often close and the scenery stunning.

Day 1: After arriving in Madrid we'll head straight for Extremadura and our hotel near Trujillo although on route we shall stop at Arrocampo Reservoir which is a locally rare wetland habitat, created from the damming of a river for the power station at Almaraz. There are a couple of hides at the southern end where we should be able to find a good variety of birds including Purple Heron, Little Bittern, Cattle Egret, Great White Egret, Purple Swamphen, Marsh Harrier, Gull-billed Tern, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler and Penduline Tit. This area has also proved to be one of the more reliable areas for Black-winged Kite. A walk along the southern edge should also allow us an opportunity to see Tongue Orchid that can be found in the short, seasonally flooded grass. We shall continue on to our hotel where we will settle in for the rest of our stay and our evening meal.

Day 2: This morning we shall head for Monfrague National Park and the castle. This vantage point, perched along a ridge line provides views over the sierras to the north and south, as well as providing a platform for many of the vultures from the nearby Pena falcon to gain lift in the early morning. Griffon Vultures sail by at head height and there's a good chance of seeing Black and possibly Egyptian Vulture too. Choughs are sometimes seen in the area whilst Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting are resident. Subalpine Warblers are also a regular sight in the surrounding trees. The nearby rock face of the Penafalcon is another excellent site for watching vultures as well as the odd Black Stork. Crag Martins and Red-rumped Swallows whizz up and down the river gorge here, often passing within feet of any onlookers. A little further on the road passes over the Tagus Reservoir with the bridge being home to masses of nesting House Martins and Alpine Swifts, before it continues south to the little village of Villarreal de San Carlos. A short circular walk takes us through mixed scrub and trees which hold a nice variety of birds including Nightingale, Hawfinch and various warblers as well as interesting plants and butterflies such as Brown Bluebell and Spanish Festoon. At the southern end of the park we take some time to scan the rock pinnacle known as the Portilla del Tietar where Spanish Imperial Eagle regularly nest along with more Griffon Vultures.

Day 3: Today we'll be exploring the nearby plains which should provide us with an excellent variety of birds. We'll set off early as the morning and evenings are normally the best times for seeing bustards and sandgrouse. Little Bustard and Great Bustard display at this time of year and we should be able to see both in their characteristic attempts to attract a female. Black-bellied and Pint-tailed

Sandgrouse are found in the area although it may take a couple of visits to catch up with all these classic steppe birds. Calandra Larks are common and we have a chance of finding Short-toed Larks in drier areas although they are scarce here. Other birds should include Woodchat Shrike, Roller and Great Spotted Cuckoo. The junction between the Santa Marta de Magasca Road and the one running back towards Trujillo is an excellent area for Montagu's Harrier. Once the day begins to warm up we'll also see vultures gathering and rising from the surrounding lower plains. We shall also explore Belen Plain which although not quite as good as the last area can still provide all the above species as well as Short-toed Eagle and waders such as Black-winged Stilt and Little Ringed Plover. We'll find ourselves towards the end of the day at Trujillo whose historic centre provides a relaxing spot to watch the Pallid Swifts that circle around the square. The nearby Bull Ring on the edge of town is also a must as Lesser Kestrels nest in the roof. They return from feeding flights in the evening and create a spectacle as they circle and call just above your head as they chase each other around.

Day 4: This morning we head for a heathland at Jaraceijo and with a bit of luck should find a good selection of warblers. Dartford Warbler are common in the shorter scrub whilst Subalpine Warbler are found singing from the taller trees nearby although it is Spectacled Warbler that we have come for and can usually be found in display in this area. Other birds here can include Orphean Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler and Nightingale as well as the regular vulture, raptors and storks. Not far away lies Arrocampo Reservoir and a second visit to this site should give us more opportunities to pick up birds such as Little Bittern and Squacco Heron that can be elusive at times as well as the striking Black-winged Kite. A limestone escarpment nearby is a good site for a variety of orchids which should include Champagne, Naked Man, Conical, Woodcock and the Yellow Bee Orchid. Birds here are likely to include Booted Eagle and other raptors.

Day 5: We shall return to the steppe above Santa Marta de Magasca this morning as this excellent area has a lot of good birds. We hope to catch up with displaying Great and Little Bustards once again as well as maybe the odd Stone Curlew which are often secretive and nocturnal in their habits. A second visit provides further opportunities to see Great Spotted Cuckoo and Iberian Shrike plus any other wildlife that we can find along the route. We shall continue towards Monfrague although stop before the park entrance to explore the Almonte River. The rivers are good areas to explore, often being rich in flowers and butterflies as well as a variety of birds that could include Cirl Bunting and Bonelli's Eagle. Reptiles may also be seen with both Spanish Terrapins and Viperine Snake found in this area. We shall also stop in Terrejon el Rubio for a walk through the flower rich dehesa. Azure-winged Magpies are abundant in the area and we should hopefully find a good variety of birds that could include Rock Sparrow, Thekla Lark, Woodlark and Spanish Sparrow amongst many others.

Day 6: Our final day is flexible and depends on how successful we have been at locating our target species during the previous days. If we have seen most birds we'll explore additional areas such as around the village of Montanchez and the ruins of the Moorish castle that have nesting Black Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush as well as Pallid Swift and Lesser Kestrel. Continuing towards Merida we come across Cornalvo Natural Park where a walk around the lake should provide views of typical dehesa birds as well as Booted Eagle and possibly Black-winged Kite. We also may be able to find the very rare and endemic Green Tongue Orchid which grows at the far end of the lake. We should also have time to visit Embalse de los Canchales which is a wetland area not far from Merida. The approach may provide sightings of Black-winged Kite whilst the lake itself has Spoonbill, Collared Pratincole and Gull-billed Tern amongst many others.

Day 7: Head back to Madrid for flights home

Short list of species: Black Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, Black-winged Kite, Lesser Kestrel, Great Bustard, Little Bustard, Gull-billed Tern, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Eagle Owl, Pallid Swift, Alpine Swift, Bee-eater, Roller, Calandra Lark, Thekla Lark, Woodlark, Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Nightingale, Black-eared Wheatear, Black Wheatear, Orphean Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Subalpine Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, Iberian Grey Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie, Spanish Sparrow, Cirl Bunting, Rock Bunting.

Dates: 27th April – 3rd May 2019

Cost: £1,300 (not including flights). We can help arrange flights if required.

Price includes 6 nights' accommodation, all meals and transport throughout the tour.

Accommodation: We'll be staying Casa Rural las Canteras

Group size: 7 (maximum)

Booking: Please email: steveduffield70@gmail.com

Where to meet: Meet in Madrid International airport