

## Extremadura and southern Spain

April 26<sup>th</sup> to May 6<sup>th</sup> 2006

Arrangements were made back in February to visit some of the Spanish bird hotspots. We decided to try 3 areas over the space of a 10-day period – starting off in Extremadura before stopping off in a rented house in Yunquera (near Malaga) then ending off in the Coto Donana. Other than the rented house, no effort was made to pre-book any digs as it was made apparent during the research that cheap digs could be found without too much effort. This was ‘generally’ true though what we didn’t foresee was the first weekend fell on a holiday period and the first Sunday we all ended up kipping in the car, which wasn’t exactly ideal. It was my first trip to Spain the other 3 individuals on the trip had visited Spain a few times in past already.

Cost: The car hire (a diesel Ford Focus G-Max with air con) and the British Airways flight from Gatwick cost about £160 each. Digs were very cheap when compared with Britain – the hotel in Extremadura was between 40 – 45€ per night for a shared room (including breakfast) and the Pension on the Coto Donana was 36€ for a shared room – not including breakfast. The rooms were clean and were all en suite. The house in Yunquera was only £150 for 10 days – though we did get a good deal on this place as one of the party knew the owner. Food was particularly inexpensive with 3 courses including wine, a few beers/coffee/fresh orange drinks only slightly more expensive than a visit to the local McDonalds in England. I took the equivalent of about £450 as spending money and returned with 135 euros and 80 pounds in English money!

Research: 2 books were used – John Muddemans excellent ‘A Birdwatching Guide to Extremadura’ and the where to watch birds book of ‘Southern and Western Spain’. Other info was gleaned from the various trip reports available online.

Participants: Gadget (real name ‘Dennis’ 3 foot 7 inches tall with more front than Selfridges. He picked up the new nickname ‘El Gadgeeto’ whilst staying in El Rocío) Francis (real name ‘The Hair’ our beloved driver and computer brained know-all) Craig (Young Craigy/Daisy) and me – Phil (6 foot five of pure muscle with half a brain - now known in Monroy as ‘Loco Phil’ - extremely apt as it goes) We all live in a dump known as Ramsgate [except Gadget] - a concrete cabbage field on the east coast of Kent. We all escape every now and then – this being the tale of one of our escapades.

General advice: Give the police a wide berth at all costs! Whilst standing on the side of the road a local bobby on a motorbike wanted us out of the way – even though we couldn’t understand a single word of what he was trying to tell us it was obvious by his body language exactly what he wanted us to do! He went berserk! Nuff said.

Accommodation: If anyone fancies visiting the Extremadura/Monfrague area you would be mad not to go to ‘La Bodega del Herrador in Monroy’. We’d heard about the place off a 2005 trip report and that group of birders said it was the best place they had found whilst in central Spain. All 4 of us loved the place – it’s brilliantly situated for all the



Extremadura birding sites, it's clean, cheap and the food is fantastic. Far above our expectations anyway. The hospitality was top notch – the proprietor (Jesus and his wife) was a hoot, with a fantastic sense of humour (which helped with the language barrier) and was so laid back that even the most nervous of houseguests like myself especially was made to feel very much at ease. Our thanks go out too, to Lisa who was a massive help – especially with helping us to order food and

wine etc. If you're interested in a booking get in touch with Lisa (English Speaking) or Jesus (Spanish speaking only) Enquiries contact: Lisa on; [Lisa@lisagranada.com](mailto:Lisa@lisagranada.com) or Jesus on; [Labodegaherrador@yahoo.es](mailto:Labodegaherrador@yahoo.es)  
Or phone direct on: telfs: 927 29 01 17 – 927 28 01 23

### Day 1. Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> April '06:

The plane left at 09.30 and arrived in Madrid one and three-quarters of an hour later. It was boiling hot and while Francis and Gadget were sorting out the car hire in the Hertz compound (the car – a Peugeot 607 was slightly too small for the four of us with all the gear – we changed it for the Focus)



Craig and I starting looking for birds off the end of the airport – picking up a White Stork, White Wagtails etc plus there were lots of Hirundines and Swifts wheeling about overhead. It was just nice to see a few birds regardless of how common they were, as the state of anticipation was high, as it always seems to be when you get abroad. After the

shenanigans with the car, we were off – heading for Monroy in Extremadura. We stopped on a few occasions and saw lots of birds on the drive from the car window. Prior to arriving in Monroy we'd seen: Common Buzzard, Black Kites, a few Booted Eagle, lots of White Storks, a few Hoopoes, Spotless Starlings, lots of Crested Larks, Thekla Lark, Bee Eaters, Cattle Egrets, Black Vulture, lots of Griffon Vulture, Red-rumped Swallow, Raven etc plus on the track into Monroy a perched Black-shouldered Kite which ended up tussling with a Common Buzzard before flying off. There were Quails calling off the side the road at this location too.

We booked in at the highly recommended 'La Bodega Del Herrador' Hotel on the main drag of Monroy. After offloading all the gear we sat in the back garden for an evening chill out amongst the lemon trees, watching the local birds wheeling about overhead as we had a bit of light refreshment. Spotless Starlings sang (fantastic mimicry) from the roof whilst we gazed at the Bee-eaters, Pallid and Common Swifts, Serins and odd raptor/Stork gliding over. Brilliant. After a late dinner we crashed out and sleeping at full speed, prepared for an early start and a day out at Monfrague.



**Day 2: Friday 27<sup>th</sup> April '06.**

Up at 05.30 and stopped off on the road leading east out of Monroy before popping back to the hotel for breakfast prior to spending the rest of the day on the Monfrague National Park. We stopped the car a few miles down the road and starting listening to what was calling in the twilight, when a Red-necked Nightjar flew right past us, across the road and out of view. It or another could be heard calling in the distance soon after. Amongst the scattered Oaks we came across lots of Azure-winged Magpies, Crested Larks, Woodlark,



Serins, Woodchats Shrikes, Sardinian Warbler, Hoopoe, Bee-eaters, calling Quail etc whilst overhead Raven, Short-toed Eagle, Griffon Vulture, Red and Black Kite plus yesterdays Black-winged Kite was re-spotted. After breakfast we drove to Monfrague stopping off at Arroyo De La Vid. We had a short walk around seeing 3 Booted and 1 Short-toed Eagle, 1 Egyptian Vulture plus Rock Bunting, Spanish Sparrow, Crag Martin and Red-rumped Swallow. Things like Griffon Vulture, Black Kites, Serins; Crested Larks

were already being ignored. We did hear Orphean Warbler singing in the river valley but unfortunately couldn't see it. The next stop was at the Castillo car park. Apart from the obvious there were a couple of Golden Oriole, Hawfinch plus both Booted and Short-toed Eagle seen here before we drove up the hill

towards the Castillo. We were told there by some English birders there had been a White-rumped Swift hanging around all morning but in the following half an hour or so we couldn't see it, so we walked up the steps towards the Castillo proper. This turned up – Blue Rock Thrush's, Rock Buntings, Egyptian Vulture, Chough etc plus 3 Black Storks were spotted flying around amongst the hoards of Vultures, Eagles and Kites. Back down by the car and



Francis spotted the White-rumped Swift whizzing about amongst the Hirundines below the Castillo. It showed well for about the following 5 minutes before we got fed up with looking at it and moved on. The next stop at Pena Falcon turned up 'lots' of breeding Griffons plus a few Black Storks and Craig saw probably the same White-rumped Swift again flying amongst the commoner stuff overhead. We ended off the day at Portillo del Tietar. On the main rock there was an adult Eagle Owl showing well amongst the breeding Griffons and in the trees to the right of the rock a Spanish Imperial



Eagle sat on its nest. Also at this spot – 2 Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, Booted

Eagle, Nightingale and Cetti's Warbler were either heard or seen. On the drive back to the hotel for din dins we saw 2 Black-eared Wheatear, 2 Southern Grey Shrike, Thekla Lark, 6+ Alpine Swifts, Short-toed Treecreeper, Subalpine Warbler and a couple of extra Egyptian Vultures were seen. Back at the hotel and with the help of a lady from America (Lisa) who had moved to the area we ordered a huge and inexpensive meal, which was demolished in record time. Don't ask me what we eat? It was very nice but unexplainable?

### Day 3: Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April '06.

Day 3 was spent in the main driving around looking for Steppe birds. We decided on the long route around to Trujillio on our way to the Belen Plain. We started off on the Monroy to Trujillio route and as soon as we arrived in some decent looking habitat things like Calandra Lark, Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel etc were common whilst the



occasional Little Bustard was encountered. We eventually made our way towards the Belen Plains where there were lots of good birds showing. On the way we had good views of a Great Spotted Cuckoo sitting just off the side of the road which as it turned out was the only one we saw on the whole trip. On the plains there were lots of Calandra Larks, Lesser Kestrels (including a breeding colony right on the side of the road) Hoopoes, Southern

Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, both large Vultures, quite a few Short-toed Larks etc also 1 Stone Curlew, calling Quails and our first Great Bustards of the trip, which included a group of 15 birds. Vast numbers of Cattle Egrets were present too. Other 'bits' seen included Little Owl, Bee-eaters, Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Hobby, Iberian Yellow Wagtail and quite a few Montagu's Harriers. In the late afternoon/evening we drove out to the Steppe habitat a few miles s/east of Santa Marga de Magasca – an area described in a 2005 trip report as 'easy' with regard to seeing both Sandgrouse species.



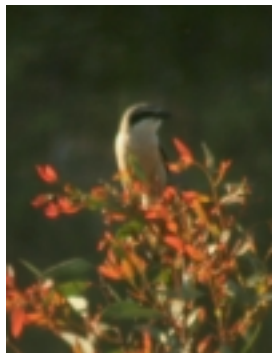
Thanks to my fantastic navigating it took us a few hours to find the place as I confused this area with another on the same map of the Muddeman book. Initially we went to the right place but I thought it was the wrong place and we drove for well over an hour to a place which turned out to be 'definitely' the wrong place and the place we went to in the first place was the right place!! (Record amount of the use of the word 'place' in a single sentence methinks?) This meant we had to drive all the way back yet again!! Mind you we did fluke a pair of Bonelli's Eagles at the river at Rio Tamuja, which took the edge off the whole event somewhat. A Short-toed Eagle went over and the 2 Bonelli's were not too happy with it being around so it was seen off. Good stuff. On this



drive around we picked up Black-eared Wheatear and a couple of Blue Rock Thrush amongst all the roadside Larks, Bee-eaters, A.W. Magpies and Raptors. Eventually we arrived at the desired site (phew!) and a fantastic evening session ensued. Good numbers of Montagu's Harriers could be seen along the roadside, which included a melanistic individual (also all the other plumages) – a fantastic bird. Along the road (if you could call it a road more of a dusty track) there were good numbers of quality birds on show. A few Rollers were hanging around the nest boxes on the telegraph poles also both Bustards and a few Short-toed and Calandra Larks plus further along the first Sandgrouse were seen and eventually we had fantastic views of both species grounded and in flight. There were about 30 Black-bellied and 7 Pin-tailed on view. Other things here included lots of Lesser Kestrel, a Fan-tailed Warbler and a pair of Stone Curlew. Unfortunately the hotel (La Bodega Del Herrador) was fully booked on the Saturday so we had to look around for somewhere else to stay. We drove around for an hour or so eventually giving up and spending an extremely uncomfortable night kipping in the car.

#### **Day 4: Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April '06.**

The day dawned and we stretched out cramped limbs and headed off south towards the house in Yunquera. (about 50 Km east and inland of Malaga) We intended to stop off to have a look at the Lagunas De Campillos to see the local White-headed Ducks but unfortunately on arrival all 4 lakes were bone dry. We drove right past the Laguna Dulce, which is right on the side of the main road without even noticing it! Of course we did – it wasn't there! We did see a flyover Gull-billed Tern and a couple of Southern Grey Shrikes but obviously no water birds whatsoever. On the long drive down with occasional stops before and after the dried up Lagunas we picked up lots of Raptors/Storks,

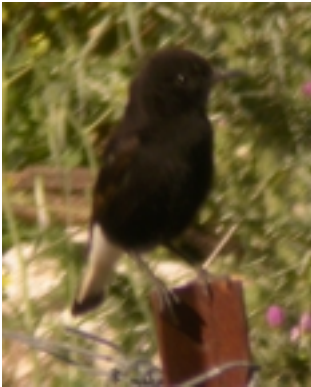


Sardinian Warbler, Crested Larks, Spanish Sparrow, Hoopoes, Bee-eaters, Cattle Egrets, Southern Grey and Woodchats Shrikes, A.W. Magpies plus a bonus Collared Pratincole which flew over the A382 somewhere the other side of Seville. 4 Chough were seen as we approached the rocky habitat near Ronda. Eventually we arrived at the house which turned out to be an ordeal all of its own. The house was situated at the bottom end of a small town, which was designed back in a time when people used to get around by Donkey. It was like trying to drive a car around you're living room and even when we got close to where we needed to unload the car it turned out there was no parking there so the car needed to get driven back through the narrow streets to a parking spot on the outskirts of the town. On the way the car ended up getting jammed on a right angle bend between 2 houses on a steep decline - the left hand rear wheel was a full 18 inches off the ground! After about half an hour the car was eventually maneuvered out (with the help of the local villagers) and then to make matters worse we collided with another car knocking off his wing mirror and putting a dent in the panel of our hire car. Unavoidable really – there wasn't enough space to swing a very, very small cat let alone drive in and out of the area in a rather bulky car. After settling in we spent the rest of the afternoon/evening watching the local birds off the rooftop balcony overlooking the town before eating a couple of

pizzas and a freshly cooked chicken in the evening. Really hit the spot I can tell you. Birds seen whilst chilling out on the balcony included: a few Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Red and Black Kite, Serins, Lesser Kestrel, Pallid Swifts and Spotless Starlings. A group of 8 migrant Honey Buzzards flew over the town in the late afternoon. A decent kip was enjoyed by one and all that night.

### Day 5: Monday 1<sup>st</sup> May '06.

Up – out and about and after a coffee or two we hit the road with the intention of hitting a few sites north of Yunquera – namely Teba Gorge and a couple of areas around the Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra. The scenery was very nice, especially when we started climbing up into the mountainous habitat outside the 2 closest towns. During our many stops we came across various raptors, singing and displaying Woodlarks, a few Subalpine Warblers, Dartford Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, Crossbill, Crested Tit, Coal Tit, Thekla/Crested Larks (probably both we couldn't be bothered to keep checking them) Nightingale, Woodchat Shrikes and 4+ Black-eared Wheatear. A few wild Goat type



things were on the cliff edges here. On the way to our first major stop of the day at Teba gorge I got my wires crossed in my mental navigation system (for the 92<sup>nd</sup> time) and we ended up driving into Teba town and things got a bit strained yet again! We did find a colony of Alpine Swifts on the outskirts of the town and as we were looking at them 2 Rock sparrows were spotted down below us. Also here there were Rock Dove and 1 -2 Blue Rock Thrush. Nearby a lovely pair of Black Wheatears showed really well too which took the edge off yet another frustrating wild goose chase. Eventually the gorge was found and it was full of birds – Egyptian Vultures flying very low overhead, a colony of Rock

Sparrow, 6+ Black Wheatear, more Alpine Swifts, Crag Martins, Rock Doves, Choughs etc etc. Quite a few butterflies were seen here too – 1 – 2 species of Gatekeeper (?), Large, Dappled and Marbled 'type' Whites, long-tailed Blue, Spanish Gatekeeper and a few Spanish Festoons. After an hour or so we headed further north heading towards the Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra which for the first time in the whole trip we actually found without going the wrong way 4 times. No doubt the new batteries in my worn out brain had kicked in? Anyway – on arrival we checked the wader pool on the east of the Laguna near the sewage works. The pool actually had some water in it (a real relief after the dried up pools from earlier on) and of course there were lots of birds. We were greeted by a breeding flock of 60+ Gull-billed Tern, Whiskered Tern, Black Tern, a few non-breeding Yellow-legged Gull, Avocets, lots of Curlew Sandpiper, Common and Wood Sandpiper, Temminck's and Little Stint, Little-ringed, Ringed and Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Red-crested Pochard plus there were a few Sardinian Warblers etc in the scrubby stuff. Out on the Laguna (a huge expanse of water with dried up margins) there were 1000's of Flamingo's and unidentified Terns and waders due to the distance and the heat haze. That



said many of the Terns were Gull-billed and the Waders, Kentish Plovers – but there must have been all sorts out there. We had a look on the obvious Crake pool (seeing nothing) and left for the house in Yunquera seeing Montagu's Harrier, Rock Bunting and a couple of Melodious Warblers on the return journey. Dinner that night was taken at the local bar run by 2 English people. Cheeseburger and chips – not very Spanish but tasty enough as it happened.

### Day 6: Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> May '06.

Fed up with the inaccessibility of the house and how difficult it was to get in and out of the town we decided to cut our losses and head down to the Coto Donana popping in at the Laguna Medina on the way to try for White-headed Duck and Crested Coot. (Red-knobbed Coot? Take you're pick) The Laguna was a lovely place crammed with birds



and interesting insects such as Ant Lion and Bee Flies – 2 things I've not seen in Britain as yet. We soon came across a group of 14 White-headed Duck also quite a few nice summer plumaged Black-necked Grebe out on the lake. In the bushy/reedy edge – Great Reed Warblers croaked their brains out whilst Melodious Warblers sang from the tops of the small trees. Very nice. Other bits seen here included: Nightingale, Whitethroat, Reed Warbler and Sardinian Warbler amongst a handful of commoner stuff. On arrival back at the car it turned out someone had nicked a hubcap off the already scratched and dented hire car! We left and headed for El Rocio (a

place straight out of a spaghetti western film set) where we immediately found some nice digs (Pension Cristana) which backed onto the wetland where there were lots of Spoonbill, Whiskered Tern, various Duck, and Flamingos etc. It was nice to see a pair of Great White Egrets waddling around in their summer plumage – I don't think any of us had ever seen a Great White with a black Bill?? Not even Francis who's seen almost everything? (Show off) We offloaded the gear, had a bite to eat and a drink or two and headed off towards El Achebuche a few miles down the road. The centre at El Achebuche was a lovely place ruined by some of the worse hides I've ever had the misfortune to

come across in my entire life! The option for viewing was a backbreaking stoop or a knee flattening kneel on the hard ceramic floor! Awful! It looked all nice and pretty but wasn't at all practical. We walked around the many hides accessible off the main paths seeing: Red-crested Pochards, Little Bitterns, Purple Herons, Night Herons, Booted Eagle, Woodchat Shrike, Crested Tit, Azure-winged Magpies, Bee-eaters and a single Purple Gallinule plus Savi's, Great Reed Warbler, Golden Oriole (one briefly glimpsed) Nightingale and an Iberian Green Woodpecker were all heard. 2 Wild Boars were spotted at



the back of the wetland plus the evidence of the digging was all around us. Retracing our steps back to the wild west town (yee ha!!) we stopped off on the El Rocio bridge seeing

nothing new before trying to find a route onto the north Marismas (marshes) for the following day but couldn't find the path/track Francis had been down on his last visit over twenty years previous. Back in the hotel we managed to find a few clues from a few bits of info we had available from a May 2005 trip report together with the 'Where to watch birds' book so decided to have another go at the elusive marismas in the morning.

### Day 7: Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May '06.

The first whole day on the Coto Danana was initially a little disappointing as much of the best areas of the Coto are only accessible via a land rover drive through the park which isn't exactly my idea of a good day out birding. I think I would much rather have my eyes



gouged out with a rusty hook than spend the day on a trip stuck in the back of a Land Rover with a bunch of holiday makers? At the time it looked as though we might have a problem finding a road onto the northern marshes so all the habitat we had available was the wetland sites similar to those we had near the hotel or the small reserves packed with the general public such as we'd come across yesterday evening. Not what I had expected even though Francis had pre-warned me about this. After a quick look on the flood near the El Rocio Laguna we headed for the small reserve over the road – La Rocina and El Acebron. A nice place but a bit public – mind you the hides were slightly better here. That said – I hadn't come all the way to Spain to sit in a rabbit hutch so it

was far from ideal. The birding was reasonable – a Black-winged Kite was perched on a pylon during the first stop plus we heard Melodious and Dartford Warbler here too. A few Night Heron, 2 Little Bittern, 2 Purple Gallinule, Marsh and Montagu's Harrier (plus Storks, Kites, odd Eagle and Vultures of course) whilst lots of Nightingale, Great Reed and Savi's Warblers were calling on the walk around the area. The area looked good for Red-necked Nightjar and we planned to return in the evening. As it turned out we bumped into a geezer from north Kent (Cliffe Pools) who said he'd seen 4-5 R.N. Nightjars the previous night. 1500 miles south of my patch and I still get recognized – "I've seen you at Pegwell" he said... I couldn't believe it. Small world innit? (if you're reading this matey I apologize for our mishog attitude. We were completely shot away. I forgot to mention we'd already been in Spain for a week.) After the excitement of waddling around the man made water-world we headed for the northern marismas not knowing if we were going to find it! As it happened we did find it and fantastic it was too. We found a likely looking spot (dry field) for Lesser Short-toed Lark – immediately finding quite a few along with fantastic views of Collared Pratincole sitting right off the roadside plus a few nice male Iberian Yellow Wagtails. As we drove further into the marshland we came across a roadside heronry containing many Cattle Egrets, Little Egrets, Night Heron and a single Squacco Heron. 6 Gull-billed Terns winged their way across the road before we came to some decent looking Spectacled Warbler habitat

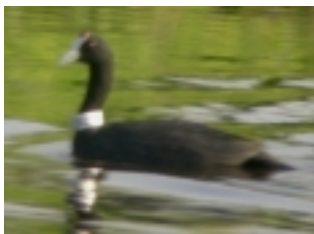


(surprisingly we didn't definitely see any though a flushed *Sylvia* sp was almost certainly a Spec) with many roadside pools containing lots of waders/Flamingos/Herons/Stilts etc giving fantastic views. We didn't check too many of the waders though we did see a few Temminck's Stints, Little Stints, Curlew sands, Kentish Plovers – also an albino Ringed Plover with a completely black collar. The most fantastic event of the whole Coto experience was when we arrived at the Jose Antonio Valverde Centre in the middle of the marsh. Wow!! Just past the centre was a roadside Heronry containing all the Herons in good numbers (except Gt White) at extremely close range along with 200+ Glossy Ibis with lots of Collard Pratincoles flying inland overhead. I thought Gadget was going to have a coronary! Not to be missed even though it is a bit of a pain to get there. Other bits seen here included: Purple Gallinule, Montagu's/Marsh Harrier, lots of Kites, Ravens and one of the tiny roadside reed beds had shoulder to shoulder Great Reed Warbler. Another Great White Egret was seen on the drive in. We did try and take the direct 14km drive back to El Rocio so as to avoid the hour plus journey back the way we'd come in by – only to meet a locked gate. Never mind eh? In the evening we went back to La Rocina to try for the Nightjars having a quick gander at the El Acebron bit further west along the same stretch of road where there were more Nightingales singing than you could shake a stick at! As we left the first Red-necked Nightjar started 'Ka-tocking' near the main building and as we drove back through the Oak trees many more were heard. Before long we found a superb male sitting in the road which we drove right up to and had views of down to 20-30 metres (probably closer?) sitting in the car headlights showing every feather. Further along the road another flew off the roadside verge before we came across another pair (male and female) the male's throat could be seen moving as he called. A fantastic experience. In the evening back at the hotel we decided to call it a day on the Coto Donana and head back north up to Extremadura in the morning taking in the Lagunas off the N-442 road to try for the Crested Coots there.



### Day 8: Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May 06'.

After loading the car and having a quick look on the marsh at El Rocio (14 Fallow Deer, 5 Black Tern and 3 Night Heron etc) we headed for the Laguna Primera de Palos on the road into Huelva where Crested Coots can be seen. We took directions out of the 'Where to watch birds in Southern and Western Spain' book but had problems finding the Laguna. The May 05' trip report had encountered similar problems. Eventually (half an hour later) we drove past the directions given knowing the lake was the most westerly of the 4 lagunas on the map (WTWBISAWS page 57) and hey presto we found it. Soon we found the target specie – a Crested Coot sporting a bit of white plastic (no. 012 - the same bird reported here in the May 05' trip report) and even though the bird was only a Coot with a white collar (or so I had presumed

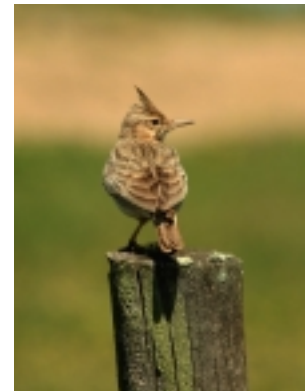


beforehand) in the flesh it was quite a smart looking bird. Certainly a lot better than American Coot (yawn) anyway. Other things seen here included: Little and Whiskered Tern, 2 Purple Gallinule, 2 Spoonbill, 2 Purple Heron, Golden Oriole, Savi's and Fan-tailed Warbler, adult Yellow-legged Gull plus a bonus Common Waxbill. On the way to Extremadura we stopped off for a bit of grub and a drink. The first stop didn't look good for any food (though the coffee was superb) and at the second stop we ordered a salad which when it turned up was rather aptly called a 'cats puke salad' by young Craig.



It was vile – potato and mayonnaise with 4 three inch bread sticks poking out of it like candles on a weird birthday cake. It looked repulsive and didn't taste any better. Gadgets face when he saw it was a picture. A photo would have been priceless – unfortunately I was up-prepared at the time. On the way back to Monroy we saw a fantastic Roller sitting on the wall of a roadside bridge right alongside the car. Birds just don't come any better than Rollers do they? We were amazed to see puddles when we entered Extremadura (though we had a thunderstorm at El Rocio on Tuesday night we still hadn't seen any rain whatsoever.) and at the first stop

there were raptors and Storks soaring all over the place including lots of Booted Eagles. By the time we arrived in Monroy it was 19.15 – so we booked in at the 'La Bodega del Herrador' (eventually) had a drink (seeing major flooding in s/east Spain on the TV news plus Barca had won the league as I had seen at the same time last year in the digs at the Carmargue) and had a quick run along the road we'd seen the Black-shouldered Kite on days 1 and 2. No sign of the Kite but all the normal stuff was there – Lots of Crested Larks and Azure-winged Magpie also Serins, Woodchat Shrikes, Buzzard, Booted Eagles, Griffon Vultures, Red-rumped Swallows and we could hear a few Quails. Back for dinner and my steak (ordered by making a 'moo' sound) was so large I couldn't eat it. We all gasped when we saw it. Vastly impressive.

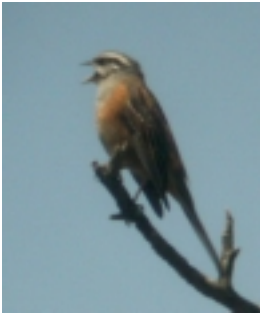


### Day 9: Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May '06.

Our last full day - so we decided to take a route taking in all the best bits we'd seen a week or so prior. A lad from Lancaster (Hi Andrew) was staying in the hotel when we arrived so he tagged along with us. I particularly wanted to go back to Teitar to see the Imperial Eagles as I'd only seen the female sitting on the nest (from the shoulder upwards) and craved flight views. We started off at the roadside pull in at Arroyo de la Vid, immediately seeing 2 performing White-rumped Swifts flying almost overhead until we got fed up with looking at them. The best views were seen as they flew below the bridge as we stood about 10 feet above them. A real surprise. Also here: Spanish Sparrow, Sardinian Warbler, Rock Bunting,



Woodlark, Short-toed Eagle, Hawfinch, Serin, Red-rumped Swallow, Crag Martin and Gadget found a pair of Cirl Bunting upriver. The Orphean Warbler was still singing in the same place but once again went unseen.



Next we drove up to the car park at the base of the Castillo at Monfrague where we saw: 2 Golden Oriole, 2 Nuthatch, 4 Hawfinch, various raptors including Egyptian Vulture plus one of the local Great-spotted Woodpeckers which are blacker and much brighter than the British things we see back home. A very smart bird indeed. We didn't drive up to the Castillo but after devouring the packed breakfast Jesus (pronounced 'Hey-zuse' the hotel

owner) had packed us we drove down the road to where the big Griffon Vulture colony is. (Pena Falcon?) 100's of Griffon Vultures, a few Black Vultures, Egyptian Vulture, the odd smaller Eagle etc plus 4 Black Storks, Rock Bunting, Black Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush were seen plus the local Red-rumped Swallows were flying past so close that Craig was holding out his arm in the hopes that one would perch on it. Next – up to the big bridge where all the House Martin and Alpine Swifts breed, then on to Tietar for the Imperial Eagles. Within a few minutes we could make out the female calling from the nest and you could see she looked interested in



something going on in the distance. Craig spotted the male flying in over the ridge and we had fantastic views there as the female left the nest to be replaced by the male (holding a reasonable sized snake) then they both landed on the nest and fed a small white chick. 100 yards down the road one of the Eagle Owl chicks was showing –



eventually walking right out into the open. 2 more Black Storks were seen here too. 2 Subalpine Warblers were seen here plus Cetti's warblers and Nightingales could be heard calling from the bushy slopes. On the way out we stopped off at the big bridge – Gadget found a decent sized Montpellier's snake plus there were 3+ Alpine Swifts and 6 Black Vultures there. On the way back to the hotel for an afternoon 'chill out' we decided to end the day off by driving out to 'Bustard Road' (the place we'd been to on day 3) which as it happened turned out to be a good move. On the way up to the track we'd seen Little Owl, Roller, 10+ Montagu's Harrier (including the melanistic bird again)

and on the stops along Bustard road: c6 Short-toed lark, many Calandra and Crested Larks, 3 Tawny Pipits, 2 more Rollers, 6 Stone Curlew, 4 Little Bustard, c8 Great Bustard, c20 Black-bellied Sandgrouse, c15 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, many Lesser Kestrels, 3 more Little Owls, 2 Red Kites (numerous Black Kite) plus there was a Vulture feeding frenzy going on in one of the fields which had lots of Griffons plus a single Egyptian and 9 Black Vultures next to it. One of the best things there was a 'funnel' of 80 newly arrived White Storks. Though we'd seen 100's already on the trip, we had not come across such an impressive group. On the drive home we saw another Roller, a few more Southern Great Grey Shrikes and a Short-toed Eagle sitting on top of a roadside pylon.

After an evening dinner we said our farewells to Jesus, his wife and Andrew (we were leaving before first light) and tried to get some kip. Although it had been a great trip – I'd had enough if I'm honest. I really fancied getting home.

### Day 10: Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May '06.

Up at 05.30 and away for 06.00 Spanish time. Our flight from Madrid was leaving at 13.10 and we had to book in 2 hours early – so we had a leisurely drive there stopping off for a coffee on the way. We timed it very well and didn't have to hang around too long at the airport which was a good thing. On the drive there we'd seen: Night Heron, Cattle Egrets, R, R Swallow, 2 Black-winged Stilts, AW Magpies plus all the obligatory Storks and Black Kites. At the place we stopped to fill up the car just off the M50 just outside Madrid, there was a rubbish tip across the way which had lots of White Storks plus a funnel of 80+ Kites circling over it. The airport checking in out of the way – the flight was slightly late and arrived in England slightly early. It was chucking it down on arrival – cest la vie.



The end. Adios Amigos.

Phil M. Ramsgate, Kent. England. (Yuk)

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For those of you out there who fell asleep reading the above – here's an 'at a glance' wotsit:

Some of the more noteworthy stuff included:

Black-necked Grebe: 20+ @ Laguna Medina.

Little Bittern: 5-6 @ El Achebuche and 2 @ La Rocina.

Night Heron: seen in small numbers at most wetland sites in the Coto Donana – lots in the Heronry @ Jose Antonio Valverde Centre.

Cattle Egret: Common. Over 200 in view at once on the fields of Belen Plain.

Great White Egret: 2 on the floods nr. El Rocio and a fly past in the Northern Marismas.

Purple Heron: Seen in small numbers at most of the wetland sites in Coto plus 2 at the Primera de Palos.

White Stork: ridiculously common.

Black Stork: 6 – 8+ seen both days that we visited Monfrague between Pena Falcon and Tietar.

Glossy Ibis: c200+ seen near the Jose Antonio Valverde Centre.

Spoonbill: Regular on the flood near El Rocio (20+) with similar numbers scattered along the road going through the northern marismas. 2 @ Laguna Primera de Palos.

Flamingo: Regular on the flood @ El Rocio and c2000 on the Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra.

Greylag: 1 on flood near El Rocio.

Red-crested Pochard: regular in small numbers on most wetlands.

White-headed Duck: 14 @ Laguna Medina.  
Griffon Vulture: Common almost everywhere.  
Black Vulture: regular @ Monfrague and 9 on a corpse on the Bustard road.  
Egyptian Vulture: Occasional 1's and 2's seen around Monfrague. 2 breeding birds in the Teba Gorge.  
Spanish Imperial Eagle: 2 adults and a chick @ Tietar.  
Short-toed Eagle: Regular seen most days @ most locations.  
Booted Eagle: Common @ all 3 areas visited.  
Bonelli's Eagle: 2 @ Rio Tamuja.  
Red Kite: Reasonably common – though overlooked amongst the highly ignorable Black Kites no doubt?  
Black Kite: Common – here there and everywhere.  
Marsh Harrier: A few seen around the marismas and reserves near El Rocio.  
Montagu's Harrier: Common around all Steppe habitats. A melanistic bird seen during both visits to Bustard road.  
Black-winged Kite: 1 seen twice on the long pot holed road leading into Monroy. Look near the biggest patch of water on the right hand side of the road on the way in a few miles outside Monroy. Another was seen somewhere else (can't remember – he he) plus another was spotted on the La Rocina reserve.  
Common Buzzard: perhaps 20 – 30 seen over the whole 10 days?  
Honey Buzzard: a probable near the Arroyo de la Vid and 8 newly arrived birds from the balcony of the house in Yunquera.  
Sparrowhawk: maximum of 2 seen – in Yunquera.  
Lesser Kestrel: Common.  
Hobby: 2 singles only.  
Red-legged Partridge: common.  
Quail: Heard in most suitable habitats.  
Red-knobbed Coot: 1 necked ringed bird (012) seen on Laguna Primera de Palos near Huelva. Ignore the directions in 'Where to watch birds in southern and western Spain' and drive past Km 15.6 on the N-442 (driving n/west) and stop opposite first big oil container (storage tank) you see on you're left. Park in the car park and view the bay from the old railway line 30 yards left of the car park. A hide sticking out into the lake should be immediately in front of you. The bird was showing well in the nearest bay.  
Purple Gallinule: Seen in small numbers at a few of the wetland sites in the Coto Donana. 2 were on the Laguna de Palos.  
Great Bustard: 19 @Belen plus 7 and c8 respectively on our two trips to Bustard Road. (muddeman lower map 10 nos 5 – 9.)  
Little Bustard: a few along the Monroy – Trujillio road and 3-4 on both trips to Bustard road. (see above)  
Black-winged Stilt: Common.  
Stone Curlew: 1 along Monroy – Trujillio road then 2 and 6 on both trips to Bustard road.  
Collared Pratincole: 1 over A-382 towards Ronda, 6+ on marismas and 30+ over Jose Antonio Valverde Centre.  
Kentish Plover: Probably quite a few @ Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra and the odd scattered individual in the marismas.  
Golden Plover: 1 @ Bustard road.

Lapwing: 1 on marismas.

Curlew Sandpiper: Lots on the Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra and a few scattered groups on the long drive through the marismas.

Temminck's Stint: 1 @ Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra and a group of 4 on the Marismas.

Little Stint: 2+ @ Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra and 10 – 20+ on the marismas pools.

Wood Sandpiper: Only 1 – @ Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra.

Black-tailed Godwit: 100+ on and over floods @ Jose Antonio Valverde Centre.

Yellow-legged Gull: c6 @ Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra and 1 @ Laguna Primera de Palos.

Little Tern: 1 @ marismas and 2 @ Laguna Primera de Palos.

Black Tern: 1 @ Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra and 5 on flood @ El Rocío.

Whiskered Tern: Common on most shallow waterways.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse: c30 and c20 on Bustard road on (lower map) Muddeman map 10.5 to 10.9.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse: c7 and c15 at same site as Black-bellied. (see above)

Rock Dove: Only seen @ Teba (mainly in the gorge) if memory serves correct?

Great Spotted Cuckoo: 1 on the drive into Belen.

Eagle Owl: an adult on the 1<sup>st</sup> visit and a fully grown fledgling on the second visit to Tietar.

Little Owl: 1 on the Monroy to Trujillo road and 4 near Bustard road.

Red-necked Nightjar: 1 just outside Monroy then 4 seen and many heard calling along the road passing through La Rocina to El Acebron.

Pallid Swift: Common.

Alpine Swift: seen at a few sites including the big bridge @ Monfrague and 2 places @ Teba.

White-rumped Swift: 1 near the Castillo @ Monfrague on 28/5/06 then 2 at Arroyo de la Vid on 5/6/06.

Hoopoe: Common.

Bee Eater: Common.

Roller: a few around the nest boxes near Bustard road plus another seen sitting off the side of the road on the drive between Coto Donana and Monroy.

Iberian Green Woodpecker: 1 heard @ El Acebuche.

Crested Lark: Extremely common everywhere.

Thekla Lark: easy enough to find especially in the Monfrague area.

Woodlark: A few seen and heard the best views on the high ground north of Yunquera.

Short-toed Lark: A few were seen @ Belen, Bustard road and the Marismas.

Lesser Short Toed Lark: 10+ seen on the roadside (dry fields) on the marismas.

Calandra Lark: Common on Steppe habitat.

Crag Martin: common around suitable habitat.

Red-rumped Swallow: Common.

Tawny Pipit: 3 on the second visit to Bustard road.

White Wagtail: common.

Iberian Yellow Wagtail: 1 @ Belen then lots around the marismas.

Grey Wagtail: A few were seen in suitable habitat.

Nightingale: Common. Vast numbers on the walk around woodland nr. El Acebron.

Black Redstart: Scarce. 3 – 4 were seen @ Monfrague. 1 at Madrid airport.

Wheatear: about a dozen were seen at scattered localities.  
Black-eared Wheatear: c15 were seen at scattered localities.  
Black Wheatear: 2 @ outskirts of Teba Town and c8 @ Teba Gorge:  
Whinchat: 1 on roadside just outside Madrid.  
Stonechat: common.  
Blue Rock Thrush: easy to find around rocky high ground.  
Sardinian Warbler: Not as common as I would have expected though still easy enough to come across.  
Sub-alpine Warbler: Relatively easy to find on higher ground.  
Dartford Warbler: 1 on high ground north of Yunquera and 2 @ La Rocina.  
Orphean Warbler: Heard in the river valley at Arroyo de la Vid on both visits and along the long road out of Monroy – unfortunately they went unseen on all 3 occasions.  
Fan-tailed Warbler: A few scattered sightings etc.  
Savi's Warbler: Heard @ Laguna Primera de Palos, El Acebuche, El Acebron and especially common @ La Rocina.  
Great Reed Warbler: Common in suitable habitat.  
Cetti's Warbler: A few were heard at scattered localities.  
Melodious Warbler: Heard and seen at a few sites. Easiest to view @ Laguna Medina.  
Bonelli's Warbler: 2 seen and a few more heard on high ground north of Yunquera.  
Spotted Flycatcher: 1 on the fence @ Jose Antonio Valverde Centre.  
Crested Tit: Seen on high ground north of Yunquera and El Acebuche.  
Long-tailed Tit: Quite a few dingy looking 'Irbii' mainly around Monfrague.  
Nuthatch: 2 near car park at bottom of Castillo @ Monfrague.  
Short-toed Treecreeper: a few were heard.  
Woodchat Shrike: Common.  
Southern Grey Shrike: easy to find – especially in Extremadura.  
Azure-winged Magpie: Common in Extremadura and Coto Donana.  
Raven: a few were seen in Extremadura and Coto Donana.  
Spotless Starling: Common around any built up areas.  
Golden Oriole: around 10 were heard or glimpsed in Extremadura/Coto.  
Spanish Sparrow: Easy to find in small numbers – especially @ Monfrague.  
Tree Sparrow: c6 were seen.  
Rock Sparrow: 2 on outskirts of Teba and a breeding colony in Teba gorge.  
Serin: Common.  
Hawfinch: 1 @ Arroyo de la Vid and a few on the road/hill up to the Castillo @ Monfrague.  
Crossbill: Heard and glimpsed near Yunquera.  
Cirl Bunting: 2 @ Arroyo de la Vid.  
Rock Bunting: Relatively easy to find near suitable habitat.  
Common Waxbill: 1 @ Primera de Palos.