

Extremadura - 2nd – 9th April 2005 by Dawn Russell

The tour group met up at Madrid airport and before long were heading southwest towards Trujillo, our base for the first part of our week. Passing through sparsely populated areas we did see many **White Storks, Black Kite and numerous Corn Buntings**, with almost every fence post holding a singing male, however the highlight was the **Black-shouldered Kite** nest site.

Arriving at the luxurious Parador within the heart of Trujillo, our accommodation for the next few days, we quickly settled in, followed by a delicious evening meal, with excellent locally produced wine. In the grounds of the Parador were a few **White Stork** nests, most of which were now huge, with colonies of **House** and **Spanish Sparrow** nesting in the bases. We also enjoyed superb views of **Hoopoe, Lesser Kestrel, Serin, Pallid Swifts** and **Spotless Starling**.

Not only did visits to Belen plains produce **Crested, Thekla, Calandra** and **Short toed Larks**, but we also had fantastic views of **Great Bustards** strutting their stuff, turning themselves inside out to impress – a sight to behold! And it wasn't long before Hugh heard the first 'Phantom Raspberry Blower' call and then we all enjoyed wonderful views of the **Little Bustard**. As we watched **Black eared and Northern Wheatear** the call of Sandgrouse were heard and seen flying off into the horizon. We quickly pursued them and although difficult to pick up in the vegetation we finally found both **Pin-tailed & Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, with everyone having excellent views of both species. We were also treated to further beautiful views of **Little Bustards** flying and foraging very close.

Driving up the mountains to Monfrague Park we picked up quite a few **Alpine Swift** and we were betwixt and between when we arrived at the **Eagle Owl** nest site, did we watch them with their 4 young or the **Spanish Imperial Eagles** who were also nesting on the same cliff face – or, perhaps we should just enjoy the **Nightingale** which popped up and sang joyously in a bush just meters away competing only with the **Subalpine** and **Sardinian Warblers** also showing well!

Scanning the skies regularly produced **Griffon and Black Vultures, Black and Red Kites, Short-toed Eagle and Booted and Bonelli's Eagles**. Although we were especially mesmerised by at least a dozen **Montagu's Harriers** effortlessly quartering the fields, displaying or perched on the ground.

More lush, greener areas provided a nice contrast in birds and habitat, including **Woodlark, Azure-winged Magpie, Cattle Egret, Bee-eater, Sardinian and Subalpine Warblers**. Whilst at the reed beds we saw **Cetti's, Fan-tailed, Savi's** and **Reed Warblers, Black-winged Stilt, Red Avadavat, Marsh Harriers, Purple Gallinule**, both **Squacco** and **Purple Herons, Spotted Redshank, Green Sandpiper**, and **Little Ringed Plover**.

We found **Red-rumped Swallow** nesting under a road bridge as well as numerous **Crag Martins** in the air and resting on the bridges. A good number of **Woodchat Shrike**, **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, **Southern Grey Shrike**, **Cattle Egret**, and **Red Legged Partridge** were seen. We also encountered **Hawfinch**, **Dartford Warbler**, **Short-toed Tree creeper**, both **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Thrush**, **Rock Buntings** and **Black Stork** on the nest! Whilst scanning the rocks an eagle-eyed member of our group located the scarce **Black Wheatear** and **Stone Curlew** was a particular treat but for one member in the group especially as it was his 500th bird!

Our accommodation at Orepeso was even more impressive, breakfasting and dining with stunning views of **Lesser Kestrels**. We returned each day triumphant at the feast of species enjoyed during our time in the field and enjoyed sumptuous meals accompanied by superb local wine!

We were also fortunate to find the **Bald Ibis** and were treated to fantastic views of **Crested Tit**, **Firecrest**, **Dipper**, **Crossbill**, **Cirl bunting** ... the list is endless!