

**Leader:** *Santiago Villa*

**Participants:** *Martin Perrow, Eleonor Skeate, Peter Thorpe and Simon Brown*

#### HIGHLIGHTS

Our trip to Extremadura on March 2006 provided a good selection of summer visitors, migrants and some of the latest wintering species. We were very lucky with the weather, with temperatures around the 20°C, and had rain only the last day just before arriving to Madrid airport.

The first day just before reaching Extremadura, where we would stay the following 6 days, we stopped in the Calera y Chozas plains where we saw our first Great Bustards, Lesser Kestrels, Stone Curlew and Great Spotted Cuckoos. There we also recorded a flock of about 40 Golden Plovers. Before leaving the plains we had great views of two Egyptian Vultures flying North, possible two migrants heading to the breeding grounds.

Extremadura was again spectacular and the highlights in Monfragüe, the main spot for birding in the region, included Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, Red-billed Choughs, Black Stork, Black Redstart and Serin in our first stop. During our first visit to this wonderful place we also saw Hawfinch, Azure-winged Magpie and an Spanish Imperial Eagle with a prey in its talons at La Portilla. A female Eagle Owl was still laying down in the nest looking after probably very small chicks. Griffon Vultures were ubiquitous and the Black ones were seen several times flying overhead.

In Belén and Cáceres plains we saw all the specialities considering the time of the year... we had good views of Great and Little Bustards, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Lesser Kestrels and Golden Plovers on migration. No chances for Bee-eaters or Rollers on mid March.

At Cabañas del Castillo a male Black Wheatear showed very well singing from the top of the old church and a pair of Peregrine Falcons were displaying with the male offering a recently killed Spottless Starling to the bigger female.

The following day in Arrocampo reservoir we had all our targets seeing very well Purple-swamp Hen, a female Little Bittern, two Squacco Herons and Marsh Harrier, while the introduced Red Avadavat was only heard. We enjoyed also a female Lesser Emperor Dragonfly which was photographed by some of the group. Near the main spot in Arrocampo we saw a Short-toed Eagle eating a big snake, two Black-winged Stilts and a very noisy Great-spotted Cuckoo. Just before leaving the area a Black Shouldered Kite suddenly appeared to chase a Common Buzzard sitting in a fence post. A second bird

joined later and we thought that they were probably breeding not far. That night close to our cottage we found two Merlins and two Hen Harrier males going straight to roost.

In our second visit to Monfragüe we had Subalpine, Sardinian and Dartford Warblers in the same spot seeing Red Deers and a Wild Boar with piglets in a nearby slope. That day we could see two adults Bonelli's Eagles flying above the Salto del Gitano viewpoint and a third bird near La Tajadilla join a Black Stork where we also saw Short-toed Treecreeper, Crested Tit and four Common Cranes flying North. In the evening the two Spanish Imperial Eagles displaying at La Portilla and an adult Eagle Owl calling first and then leaving the nest when it was almost dark.

The last day near Madrid in the Henares river we specially enjoyed with new views of Eagle Owl, Iberian Chiffchaff and "Iberian" Green Woodpecker. A perfect end for a wonderful trip!



Black Wheatear / Photo: Spainbirds



Black Stork / Photo: Spainbirds

Thanks again all for your company and for doing the trip so enjoyable!