

NNBC Trip to Etremadura and the Gredos Mountains  
16-23May 2019

The three hour drive from Madrid brought us to our hotel for the next four days in the middle of the steppes. A ruined building nearby was like a tenement block of White Storks' nests (approximately 30) mostly with well grown young. Supper was overlooking this area and we had to keep reaching for the binoculars. The highlight was a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos who sat on the fence giving us good views.

The next day most of us were woken by the resident Hoopoe and a chorus of the Bee eaters and Crested Larks. We went to Montfrague National Park. We stopped by the cliffs home to a vast number of Griffon Vultures. In amongst them was spotted the Black Stork nest and a Peregrine. In contrast to them were the stunning Blue Rock Thrushes. Overhead flew Black Kite, a Black Vulture, Short-toed Snake Eagle. We also had Four Aegyptian Vultures, three booted Eagles and a Bonelli's Eagle. Our superb picnic by the river gave us Swallows and Martins amongst others. When we cleared away a red deer came to clear up what we had left which of course was nothing! In all we had 72 species and it was only our first full day!

Day three we started out on the plains in a cold wind. There were Bee-eaters, Larks and Iberian Magpies. The next stop we had seven male Great Bustard and one Lesser Bustard. Further on there was the tree which had an Imperial Eagle's nest in it. The Eagle made two very brief appearances but if you blinked you missed it! Lunch was by another river which was full of Iberian Pond Frogs and Spanish Pond Terrapins. Two Kingfishers showed well. Later the road was covered in grasshoppers and twenty plus black kites were feasting in front of us. On the wires were European Rollers and Lesser Kestrels. The next stop produced four Black-bellied Sand Grouse. On returning home a Little Owl was perched on a wall finishing off another excellent day.

Day four took us into the Madronera Woodland, mainly downy/Pyrenean oak mostly covered in lichen. Golden Oriole called all around and were finally spotted when flushed out by an Iberian Magpie. Also present were Woodlarks, Sardinian Warblers, Bonelli's Warbler, Nuthatch and Blue tits. Hawfinch were everywhere and there was the wonderful sight of a fledgling with very stubby tail and wing feathers sitting on a branch calling for food. It finally fell/dropped into the long grass below. Lunch on an old stone bridge over a stream was another delight. We watched a stonechat family feeding, listened to a Nightingale which finally came and perched just in front of us. The Woodchat Shrike also showed well. Everywhere we went today had wonderful flowers and butterflies in abundance. In the afternoon we went back to Trujillo the town nearest to our hotel to see a colony of Lesser Kestrels. Then we walked round the walls of the Castle which gave good views for miles of the surrounding countryside. In the evening the setting sun gave a fabulous blood red sky and a lovely Little Owl silhouetted on the end of a barn. It then went hunting and was mobbed by a bat! We listened to the call of the Stone Curlew and the Red-necked Nightjar.

Day five was time to move on. We started off in scrubland which yielded larks and warblers the highlight being Dartford Warbler and Spectacled Warbler which showed well. The reservoir gave us a Bittern, Purple Gallinule, Purple Herons, Marsh Harriers and Penduline Tits. Then we went to look for the Black-winged Kite. Eventually it was spotted, though some distance away, and was also seen in flight. We continued up into the Gredos Mountains where the temperature had us reaching for the fleeces after the 33 degrees we had just left. The sight of the Old Roman Road wending its way alongside our road was quite a sight. Little did we know we were going to walk up another part of it the next day! Our hotel at Hayos del Espino was also excellent but very different. We took pictures of the views from the windows across the valley and also of beautifully presented food! The pre dinner bird species count was 77 the best yet.

Day five started with a pre breakfast stroll along the road where Serins were in abundance. Black Redstart, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Nightingale which showed well daily. Cuckoos were heard and Hoopoe.

We then headed off to the Plataforma de Gredos a National Park to walk up the immaculately restored Roman Road. Stunning views of Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, Northern Wheatear and Ortolan Bunting were had. Spanish Ibex were everywhere and about twenty of them passed by as we sat on the plateau above a stream having lunch.

After walking back down our guide found us a Vinerine Water Snake. An excellent day and everyone got all the way up and safely back down again!

Day Six and our last full day saw us in Puente del Buniol also known as Bonelli's Wood because of the Western Bonelli's Warbler which is there in abundance. In abundance also were the wild flowers particularly Peonies and yet more butterflies. We came out on to a raised area of huge rocks to see two pairs of Honey Buzzard displaying overhead much to the concern of a Black Kite nesting nearby. We watched and admired them for some time and then realised we had seen eight different birds of prey that day. Then it was nine as a Hobby was seen by our eagle-eyed guide. On the way home we went by the Torres River where we saw Ocelated Lizard, Iberian Water Frog and a large Red Fox which was actually very blond!

Day Seven. A quick walk before breakfast to say farewell to the feathered residents along the road and we set off home. We stopped at a Paradour which had crested tits in the grounds but which were only heard. However there were squirrels, at least half a dozen all over the place. We then had a Bonelli's Warbler in full song on a branch in front of us. Rob our guide took a video with an iphone through his telescope and it is on the Club facebook page along with an excellent daily record of our holiday.

It was a wonderful week which went so quickly. Every day was a different habitat, the wild flowers, the sounds of Cuckoos, Hoopoes, Larks and Warblers etc filled our ears. Our wonderful daily picnics produced by Rob our guide were a veritable feast and Rob himself was a brilliant guide with an encyclopaedic knowledge of his birds. His enthusiasm was infectious and we enjoyed every minute. Thank you Rob!