

TRIP REPORT

GREDOS AND MONFRAGÜE 21-26 April 2008

Participant: Tricia Scott

Guide: Claire Graham

Monday 21st of April – Day 1

I met Tricia at the Hostal Madrid at 13h00 and we started to make our way out of Madrid, heading in a North-West direction. We drove over the pass of “Alto del León” of the Guadarrama Mountains, surrounded by Scots Pine, and made our first stop in the village of El Espinar. It was interesting to remark upon the fact that, because of bad weather conditions over the past couple of weeks, Common Swifts had not arrived yet and House Martins had arrived and then had left! We wouldn't see them until several days later when we reached the lower grounds of Extremadura. After a walk around the church with at least 10 pairs of White Storks nesting there, we had a short walk along the bottom of the nearby hills, amidst fields of pasture, scrubland and on the edge of a pine wood. It was windy, cold and there was the occasional shower of rain or even hailstone but we were eager to start bird watching so we braved the elements and were rewarded with some nice sightings: Black and Griffon Vultures (albeit a little too distant for Tricia's taste!), Red Kite, a Northern Goshawk in display flight, Common Wood Pigeon, Barn Swallow, Yellow Wagtail, Woodchat Shrike, Common Stonechat, Robin, Blackbird, Blackcap, Common Whitethroat, Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed Tits, Cirl Buntings (which seemed to me omnipresent!), Rock Bunting, Greenfinch, Linnet, European Serin, Common Chaffinch as well as the usual House Sparrow, Spotless Starling, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw and Magpie. Not bad for a short walk! Best of all, a Short-toed Eagle flew across our little valley very low which enabled us to see it in full detail!

As both, Tricia and myself had eaten “churros” in Madrid just before leaving, we didn't eat our picnic until pretty late (although not by Spanish standards!) and ate in the minibus because it was too cold to sit outside.

As we were leaving, already in the car, a Booted Eagle (a clear morph) passed right over our heads which made us jump out of the car straight away! Another close-up view of a raptor which delighted Tricia.

During our drive through the plains of Campo Azálvaro we spotted Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Hoopoe, Skylark, Northern Wheatear, Montague's Harrier, as well as Grey Heron and Great Crested Grebe in the reservoir of the Voltoya River. Just before reaching Ávila, a Spanish Imperial Eagle was perching on a high-power electric pylon. We watched it preen and stretch for a good 10 minutes.

It was getting late and in our final lap from Ávila to Navalperal de Tormes there was no more time to stop but we still managed to see a Southern Grey Shrike from the car.

Upon arrival at our small country hotel *La Cruz del Gallo* in the village of Navalperal, we were greeted by Javier and his old friendly dog Rouco, and later by Lola, our hostess and cook. We were to be the only guests in the hotel for the three nights we spent there.

Tuesday 22nd of April – Day 2

An early walk before breakfast down towards the river Tormes enabled us to spot Northern Wheatear, Woodlarks singing away, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Rock Bunting and Bonelli's Warbler.

After a good hearty breakfast at *La Cruz del Gallo*, we spent the morning walking in a small valley near Navalperal and we were in for several surprises as a result of the unusual long spell of cold and rain/snow: we saw Bluethroat, Ortolan Bunting and Rock Thrush which “should” have been on higher grounds, so we were delighted. A Short-toed Eagle flew very low for a few minutes before disappearing and we also saw Griffon Vulture, Red and Black Kite, Common Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Common Kestrel, Woodpigeon, Barn Swallow, Woodchat Shrike, Common Stonechat, Northern Wheatear, Black Redstart, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Blackcap, Common Whitethroat, Bonelli’s Warbler, Blue, Great and Coal Tits, Long-tailed tit, European Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Cirl Bunting, Rock Bunting, Goldfinch, Linnet, Serin, Rock Sparrow, etc (refer to the checklist for a full list of birds).

After this fruitful morning we ate our picnic by the river where we admired the Dipper, Wren, Crag Martin, Yellow Wagtail and Red-rumped Swallow.

Having had a coffee in the village of Navacepeda to warm up a little bit, we headed towards the area know as Plataforma de Gredos, driving along the valley of the Barbellido. On our way, we watched a pair of White Wagtails doing their very funny courtship display: the male was running around the female bowing and drooping one wing, until eventually they mated and the male left. All very exciting!

We would also see Grey Wagtail, Red-legged Partridge, Dunnock (on almost every broom bush!), Skylark, and several Water Pipits chasing insects on the thick snow.

On our way back, Tricia spotted a wild boar from the car. We stopped and had a good look at it before it disappeared into the bushes. We made several more stops and searched intensively for Dartford Warbler in the broom. We heard several times but only managed very short glimpses of it.

We were back at our hotel pretty tired after this long but very productive day out, ready for one of Lola’s tasty dinners accompanied by good wine!

Apart from the birds, we had also seen large groups of Spanish Ibex, some large males and females with their kids, a Red Fox, Large Psammodromus, and butterflies such as Spanish Festoon, Clouded Yellow and Small Heath.

Wednesday 23rd of April – Day 3

Our early morning walk was spent looking for the nightingales that were singing their heads off at every corner! Tricia spotted the first one and we enjoyed watching it sing for a long time. We would see several more.

After breakfast, we spent the morning walking in the lovely pine woods of Navarredonda and Hoyos where we saw all the species of raptors that we’d seen yesterday plus a Peregrine Falcon, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blackcap, Bonelli’s Warbler, Goldcrest and Firecrest, Crested Tit as well as Great, Coal and Blue tits, Short-toed Treecreeper, and a Nuthatch narrowing the entrance to its nest with mud. We also saw several Red Squirrels.

We’d hear Green Woodpecker as on other days but didn’t manage to see it...

Having had lunch in a small restaurant to hide away from the cold for a while, we spent the afternoon on higher grounds amidst Gold Broom and saw Southern Grey Shrike, Bluethroat, Dunnock, Montague’s Harrier, Rock Bunting, Common Whitethroat, Rockthrush. The afternoon was fairly quiet in the way of birds, perhaps as the weather was unusually cold, so we returned to the hotel relatively early and enjoyed watching the territorial Northern Wheatear as well as various other birds from the balcony.

Thursday 24th of April – Day 4

On our last morning walk in Navalperal, we heard a Wryneck call just once, saw a couple of Cuckoos chasing one another, and various other birds but the hit of the walk were some excellent views of a beautiful Weasel: the sun was low and behind us, so it probably couldn't make out what we were and it made its way along a dry stone wall, stopping every few seconds to have a good look at us, came as close as one metre away from us, and then it eventually disappeared behind the wall.

Having had our last breakfast at *Cruz del Gallo* we started our journey towards the southern side of the Gredos Mountains and onto Monfragüe where we would spend the rest of the day, watching Griffon Vultures galore, Black Vultures, Egyptian Vultures (watch them mate also!), Red billed Cough being mobbed by Crag Martins, Azure winged Magpies, Alpine and Common Swifts, Thekla Lark, Red-rumped Swallows, Blue Rockthrush, Black Stork, Subalpine Warbler, Sardinian Warbler to name just the more relevant species.

Most amazing, was the behaviour of Crag Martins that we watched sunbathing in a state of torpor: apparently a behaviour thought to be for the control of ectoparasites.

We finished off the day spending a long time watching a magnificent Eagle Owl on the rocky outcrops opposite the viewing point known as the Portilla del Tiétar and Spanish Imperial Eagle fairly high in the sky.

Among butterflies, the hit of the day was a lovely Marsh Fritillary. We also saw a Speckled Wood, and Red Deer.

When we reached our hotel in the evening, we had a well deserved beer in its lovely jasmine-scented patio to recover from this long successful day. We managed to cope with the sudden change in temperatures, from the 8°C we'd had on the northern slopes of the Gredos to the 30°C at Monfragüe! We had enough strength left after dinner to go out to check on the village church Barn Owl (which we saw leave the church) and then drove through the *dehesas* in the hope of spotting other nocturnal species. We didn't see or hear other owls or any nightjars but saw Rabbit, a herd of wild boars crossing the track in our headlights, Western Spadefoot and many bats which Tricia was very excited about as she is very interested in these fascinating creatures. Next time we'll have to go with a bat detector!

Friday 25th of April – Day 5

Our last full journey was spent along the shores of the Reservoir of Arrocampo and the surrounding fields and holm oak *dehesas*. As usual, the reservoir provided a long list of bird species and great sightings: Marsh Harrier, Great Crested Grebe, Grey and Imperial Herons, Cattle, Little and Great White Egret, Little Bittern, Eurasian Spoonbill, Mallard, Gadwall, Moorhen, Purple Gallinule, Black-winged Stilt, Gull-billed Tern, Kingfisher, Cetti's Warbler, Reed Warbler, Great Reed Warbler and Fantail Warbler.

Crested larks and Corn Buntings were everywhere in the fields around the reservoir and we also saw Spanish Sparrow.

After a visit to the village church to admire the Lesser Kestrels that nest there, we enjoyed our luxury picnic that the hotel had prepared for us in an empty hide to protect Tricia's fair skin from the heat of the midday sun!

In the afternoon, we braved the heat through the *dehesas* where, although rather quiet because of the heat, we managed several new species such as Black-eared Wheatear and, most surprising of all, Whinchat which we observed for a very long time. Also surprising for the area, there was a Northern Wheatear. Of course, we also saw many

beautiful Bee-eaters, the usual birds of prey, shrikes, larks, etc. (refer to the checklist below).

Back at the hotel, it didn't take us long to find ourselves sitting in the patio drinking a nice cold beer!!

We went for a short walk around the village before dinner in the hope to find the Little Owl which is often seen there.

Saturday 26th of April – Day 6

Having enjoyed once more the hotel's lovely warm bread rolls for breakfast, we departed on a search for Golden Orioles, a bird we hadn't seen yet.

It didn't take very long to find a small stream with poplars along its banks which looked ideal for Golden Oriole and indeed, there were several males and at least one female around. We ended up having really good views of a male.

We continued along the river Tiétar and then across the open woodland areas between Oropesa and the reservoir of Rosarito in the hope to see a Black-shouldered kite but we couldn't reach the best area where it is usually seen because of road works and eventually failed to spot it! It will have to wait another visit! After a quick picnic by the dam of the Rosarito reservoir, we headed back to Madrid as it was getting late already.

This was again another very successful trip thanks to Tricia's enthusiasm and endurance!

Claire Graham
May 2008

Checklist of Birds Seen During the Trip – 21-26 April 2008

English name	Latin name	21 Apr	22 Apr	23 Apr	24 Apr	25 Apr	26 Apr	Total
Great-crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	x				x		x
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	x				x	x	x
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					x	x	x
Cattle Egret	<i>Bulbucus ibis</i>					x	x	x
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>					x		x
Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>					x		x
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>					x		x
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	x	x		x	x	x	x
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>				x			x
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>					x		x
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	x			x	x	x	x
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>					x		x
Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	x			x	x		x
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	x	x		x	x	x	x
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>				x			x
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentiles</i>	x						x
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x
Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	x			x			x
Montague's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	x		x			x	x
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>					x		x
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	x	x	x		x		x
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			x		x		x
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>					x		x
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		x	x	h		x	x
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>					h		h
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					x		x
Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>					x		x
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>						x	x
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>					x		x
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>					x		x
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	x	x		x	x	x	x
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>					x	x	x
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>					h		h
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		x	h	x	h		x
Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>				x			x
Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>				h			h
Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>				x			x
Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>				x			x
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			x	x	x	x	x
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					x		x
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>				x	x	x	x
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	x	h	x	x	x	x	x
Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>				h			
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		h	h	h			h
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocops major</i>		x	x	x			x
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>					x	x	x
Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>				x	x		x
Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		x			x		x
Sky Lark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	x	x	x				x
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>		x		x		x	x
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>				x	x	x	x
Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>					x		x
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>		x					x

English name	Latin name	21 Apr	22 Apr	23 Apr	24 Apr	25 Apr	26 Apr	Total
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		x			x	x	x
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		x				x	x
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	x	x	x				x
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	x		x		x	x	x
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		x					x
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	h	x	x	x			x
Dunnock (Hedge Accentor)	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		x	x				x
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>					x		x
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	x	x	x		x		x
Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>		x	x				x
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				x			x
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	x	x	x	x			x
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	x	x	x	x			x
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		h	x	x	h	h	x
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>		x	x				x
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		x					x
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		x			x		x
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h				x	h	x
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>					h		h
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>					x		x
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>					x	x	x
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	x	x	x	x			x
Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>				x			x
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>				x			x
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	x	x	x	x		x	x
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		x					x
Fan-tailed warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>					x		x
Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>		x	x	x			x
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			x				x
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>			x				x
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	x		x				x
Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>			x				x
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalus caudatus</i>	x	x		x			x
European Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		x	x	x			x
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		x	x	x			x
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>				x	x	x	x
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	x	x					x
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>		x					x
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	x	x	x	x			x
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	x						x
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	x	x	x	x			x
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>				x	x		x
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		x	x				x
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>						x	x
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		x	x	x	x		x
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	x	x	x	x			x
Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	x				x	x	x
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>		x		x	x	x	x
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		x	x	x			x
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>				x			x