

# Extremadura, Spain

29<sup>th</sup> May – 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2017

Fairly intense two days birding, with pauses during the hottest part of the day when bird activity was minimal due to the heat. Flew into Madrid and hired a car, then drove 2 ½ hour westwards to Monfragüe National Park where we were based, Main hoped for targets included a lot of species typically high on most birders wish lists for this region; Azure-winged Magpie, Spanish Imperial Eagle, White-rumped Swift, and Red-necked Nightjar. All target birds seen with little issue and a truly superb supporting cast. Food was excellent, locals friendly, and the region really does have a 'non-touristy' feel about it.



*Black Kite - Castillo de Monfragüe – May 2017 - ©Nikola Zalas*

Even though this was primarily a short birding break, I was with my non-birding partner Nikola Zalas. Whilst Nikola is not a birder, she really did enjoy this trip, not only do you see a lot of birds, we found you also get good views of most species. Good views of impressive birds combined with an aesthetically pleasing landscapes, architecture and excellent food meant that this trip still stands as our favourite to date.



MONDAY 29TH MAY 2017 – Primarily Travel

The first day was solely travel, we left Newcastle International for Madrid Airport on Monday afternoon, we flew with Ryanair and landed in Madrid at around 20:00 local time (19:00 UK time). We then hired a car from Centauro Car Hire, I would not rent from the company again. No car hire office at Madrid airport, unlike most of the other well-known firms. It took us an hour and a half to get on the road, which is far from ideal when you consider I then had to drive two and a half hours to Monfragüe national park. Always read T's and C's before hiring a car I learnt, we had a KM limit per day applied to our hire, I would advise paying a little extra to avoid this.

Almost immediately upon entering Monfragüe national park from the northern road (toward Plasencia) we had our first **Red-necked Nightjar** which flew over the road in the headlights.

TUESDAY 30TH MAY 2017 – Monfragüe National Park

Dawn at Villarreal de San Carlos provided the first **Azure-winged Magpies** of the trip as soon as I had looked out of the window! A mix of young deciduous trees here and big skies mean the area was generally quite productive, over the course of the day we logged **Crested Lark**, **Golden Oriole**, **Hawfinch**, and both **Griffon** and **Black Vulture**.

After breakfast we spent some time on the road between La Tajadilla and Villarreal de San Carlos we had terrific views of both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** as well as **Subalpine Warbler**, **Woodchat Shrike**, and flyover **Booted Eagle** whilst we watched a **Short-toed Eagle**. We had distant views of a **Red-legged Partridge** perched atop of an outcrop, which is notable for a UK based birder given they are not introduced here.

La Tajadilla and the dam area provided both **Griffon Vultures** and **Egyptian Vulture**, from here throughout the day at various points we logged **Black Redstart**, **European Bee-Eater**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Swallow**, **House Martin**, **Crag Martin**, and plentiful **Black Kite**. Despite the picnic area being noted as a great site for **Azure-winged Magpie**, we didn't see any during this trip though we were never there with picnicking tourists in attendance. Mirador Bascula was worth a look with **Turtle Dove**, **Woodchat Shrike**, and **Azure-winged Magpie**.

Portilla del Tietar was visited late morning and again late evening. During the morning visit we were treated to fantastic views of **European Bee-Eater**, nesting **Griffon Vultures**, and a single flyover **Black Stork**. Whilst all this took place there was a family of **Western Subalpine Warblers**, **Long-tailed Tits** (*irbii*), **Red-rumped Swallows**, and a single **Rock Bunting** in and around the viewpoint area. A singing male **Blue Rock Thrush** was also a nice bonus on the road and the rock formation itself, it shared its singing platform with a male **Rock Bunting**. As was the case practically everywhere in the park; **Black Kite** was common here and we also has views of **Serin**, **Swallow**, **Hawfinch**, **House Martin**, **Crag Martin**, **Woodpigeon**, **Grey Heron** and singles of both



**Turtle Dove** and **Sparrowhawk** over the hillside behind the viewpoint. Evening visit provided late evening **Egyptian Vultures** flying over, and two fantastic **Spanish Imperial Eagles** appeared over the hillside behind the viewpoint and harassed a **Griffon Vulture** before the male proceeded to then roost on view, with the female disappearing elsewhere to roost.

The impressive bridge between Pena Falcon and Villarreal de San Carlos provided truly terrific views of a colony of **Alpine Swifts**, a handful of **Crag Martins**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, and staggering amounts of **House Martin**, around the hills we heard **Golden Oriole** and had views of **Egyptian Vulture**, **Griffon Vulture**, and **Black Kites**.

A visit to Pena Falcon is a must, it is mightily impressive with towering scenery with swirling Vultures and Storks going about their business. From the viewpoint itself, we had great views of adult **Blue Rock Thrush** feeding its young, whilst **Griffon Vultures** perched less than 100 yards away on towering rock formations. A single **Black Vulture** was seen here high up, but we had terrific views of **Black Storks** and we heard a distant **Hoopoe**.

Monfragüe Castle is worth a visit even without any birds, but the area provided us with **Hawfinch**, **Serin**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, and **Black Redstart**. We also had incredible views of eye level **Griffon Vulture** and **Black Kites** that drift past as they move around the Pena Falcon area. After a short while we had seen many **House Martins**, **Swallows**, a handful of **Crag Martins**, **Red-rumped Swallows**, and finally views of a single **White-rumped Swift**. No sooner had it appeared before totally vanishing, not to be seen again before moving on.



*Black Vulture - May 2017 - ©Nikola Zalas*



WEDNESDAY 31ST MAY 2017 – 'The Steppe Country'

Talavan & Embalse de Talavan provided us with fantastic views of dark phase **Booted Eagles** as well as **Crested Larks**, and a superb colony of **White Storks**. Our first **Marsh Harriers** of the trip were seen here as well as good views of **Iberian Grey Shrike**, **European Bee- Eaters**, and **Stonechat**. **Great Reed Warbler** was heard, and **Griffon Vultures** were a more than common sight here. I had distant heat- haze views of what was almost certainly a couple of Collared Pratincoles but when I got my scope onto the area there was no sign.

Moving onto Hintojal provided some superb views of **Calandra Larks** both perched up and in flight. **White Storks** were seen, as were **Booted Eagle**, **Lesser Kestrel**, and **Montagu's Harrier** both put in appearances here. Moving onto another site that had held Black Wheatear (Rio Almoute) did not provide this hoped for target; however, we did have fantastic views of **Crag Martins**, **House Martins**, and **Alpine Swifts**. We also heard **Hoopoe** across the river but did not see it. An afternoon visit to Caceras provided **European Roller** and **Short-toed Eagle** on the city outskirts and awesome views of **Common Swifts** and **Pallid Swifts** in the city itself, but perhaps more importantly some top-notch Spanish food! A fantastic road just off the A58 had nest boxes that were alive with **European Rollers**, **Little Owls**, **Lesser Kestrels**, and **Jackdaws**. We also saw **Marsh Harrier**, **Short- toed Eagle** and **Calandra Larks**. Eventually we managed to find a single **Great Bustard** which was then joined by a second, the heat was fairly punishing and so the haze was appalling when there was no cloud cover.



*White Stork - May 2017 - ©Nikola Zalas*



THURSDAY 1ST JUNE 2017 - Serradilla, Monfragüe & Saucedilla

A morning visit to Serradilla was a little disappointing, though we did add **Woodlark** to the trip list and saw **Sparrowhawk** over the woodland. **Red-rumped Swallow** and **Western Subalpine Warbler** were also seen. A single male **Blue Rock Thrush** was glimpsed but was all too brief and disappeared. We returned to Monfragüe and Pena Falcon area and were rewarded with **Black Stork** and **Griffon Vulture**. Whilst in Villarreal de San Carlos we had tremendous views of soaring **Griffon Vultures** and **Black Vulture**, in and around the tourist areas **Azure-winged Magpie** and **Golden Oriole** showed well, as did the local **Blackbirds**, **Hawfinches**, and **Crested Larks**.

A late afternoon/early evening visit to Saucedilla was memorable, **Great Reed Warbler** were heard several times, whilst **House Sparrow** and **Spanish Sparrow** were common around the outskirts of the reserve. A few nesting **White Storks** were around, and a scattering of **Spoonbill** were a welcome sight. **Black Kites** were abundant in and around the reserve, alongside at least two separate parties of **European Bee-Eaters**. Even though it was late in the spring we still heard **Cetti's Warbler** and we had excellent views of **Zitting Cisticola** displaying as well as a few birds feeding. A horse field nearby contained a party of **Cattle Egrets**. **Purple Herons** were common in the reedbeds. As the afternoon went on, it became apparent that the **Night Herons** were becoming more active with quite a few flyovers, **Gadwall**, **Mallard**, and **Red-crested Pochard** were on the water itself with **Moorhen** and **Purple Gallinule** also being seen (the latter by Nikola only). **Little Egret** flew over and **Cormorants** were abundant, a couple of **Black-winged Stilts** were most welcome and were the only ones of the trip. Even though **Gull-billed Tern** did appear it was frustratingly brief as they were only flyovers, we did also see them later, but again as flyovers. A single male **Little Bittern** was seen right near the reserve visitor centre; it showed fantastically in flight and then perched up in a tree before clambering down into the reedbed. The trees also provided views of **Hawfinch** and **Lesser Kestrel**. Hirrundines seen consisted of **Swallow**, **House Martin**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, and our only **Sand Martins** of the trip.

An evening visit to Monfragüe Castle provided fantastic views of **Common Swift**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Crag Martin**, **House Martin**, **Swallow** and awesome views of a single **White-rumped Swift** at 21:20, which hung around briefly, flew off distantly and swung around before heading off toward Pena Falcon. It was not seen again before leaving. An evening around Monfragüe provided fantastic views of **Nightingales** feeding by the roadside and then finally at 22:00 the first **Red-necked Nightjar** started to sing and after tracking it down we had fantastic views of birds in both flight and perched in top of a tree singing. At least two different birds were seen, but possibly three were present.

FRIDAY 2ND JUNE 2017 - Primarily Travel

Today was primarily travel back to Madrid airport and our flight back to Newcastle airport.



## COMPLETE TRIP LIST

SPECIES LIST	COMMENTS
Mallard	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Gadwall	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Red-Crested Pochard	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Red-legged Partridge	Seen on the hillsides on the road between La Tajadilla and Villarreal de San Carlos.
Great Crested Grebe	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Cormorant	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Little Bittern	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Night Heron	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland. Best to go early morning or late evening to see this species.
Cattle Egret	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Little Grebe	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Grey Heron	Seen on the river at Portilla del Tietar.
Purple Heron	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland with reedbed habitat which is favoured by this species.
Black Stork	Breeding at Pena Falcon and seen flying around Portilla del Tietar.
White Stork	Noted at Talavan and Embalse de Talavan as well as at both Hintojal and Saucedilla.
Spoonbill	Seen at Saucedilla.
Griffon Vulture	The easiest vulture to see in the region, in any sort of open habitat it is a relatively easy species to connect with as they soar around looking for carcasses.
Black Vulture	Whilst older guidebooks will note that Black Vulture is difficult to see in Monfragüe this was not our experience. The species has clearly undergone a large population increase and is easy to see.
Egyptian Vulture	Not nearly as abundant as its cousins, but seen with relative ease at Portilla del Tietar, La Tajadilla, and Pena Falcon.
Spanish Imperial Eagle	We only saw the species at Portilla del Tietar during our trip, the pair had failed to nest here nearby in 2017 but were visiting the area. Best advice is to speak to other birders in the park to gauge best sites that particular year.
Short-toed Eagle	Seen on the road from La Tajadilla to Villarreal de San Carlos. Also seen on the outskirts of Caceras, proving that the species really isn't hard to come by in the region.



Booted Eagle	Seen on the road from La Tajadilla to Villarreal de San Carlos and at Talavan. Additionally, seen at Hintojal.
Black Kite	Can be seen readily throughout the region with relative ease, though there are quite impressive numbers in Monfragüe National Park.
Marsh Harrier	Seen at Talavan & Embalse de Talavan, also by the nest boxes listed in the David Gosney guide by the A58.
Montagu's Harrier	Seen on the plains at Hintojal, this was the only site we saw the species.
Common Buzzard	Seen without difficulty.
Sparrowhawk	Seen in Monfragüe.
Kestrel	Outnumbered in most areas by Lesser Kestrel.
Lesser Kestrel	Seen at Hintojal, by the nest boxes by A58, and even seen at Saucedilla wetland.
Moorhen	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland.
Purple Swamphen	Noted only at Saucedilla, an expansive wetland. Heard more often than seen at this time of year.
Great Bustard	Seen at the plains in the Hintojal area. The grass was very high at this point making even this large species difficult to locate.
Black-winged Stilt	Seen in and around Saucedilla.
Gull-billed Tern	A flock of birds were seen initially at Saucedilla and then in the surrounding area.
Little Owl	Noted around nest boxes by the A58.
Cuckoo	Heard only.
Red-necked Nightjar	All sightings coming from Monfragüe National park, the species isn't particularly difficult to see here.
Swift	Abundant in most areas.
Pallid Swift	Seen nesting on buildings in Caceras.
Alpine Swift	Colony seen at Villarreal de San Carlos.
White-rumped Swift	Only seen at Monfragüe castle, but with patience you should connect with the species with relative ease.
Hoopoe	Quite easy to see in this region.
Kingfisher	Seen on the river at Portilla del Tietar.
European Bee-Eater	Seen at Portilla del Tietar, Talavan & Embalse de Talavan, and at Saucedilla.
Roller	Seen in nest boxes just off the A58.
Crested Lark	Easy to come by.
Thekla Lark	Not as easy to come by, but still noted.
Woodlark	Seen at Serradilla.



Calandra Lark	A bird of the plains, seen at Hintojal and surrounding areas.
Sand Martin	Seen at Saucedilla, the only location we had the species on this trip.
Crag Martin	Seen at Monfragüe castle, and excellent views at Villarreal de San Carlos. Also seen at Rio Almoute.
Red-rumped Swallow	Fairly easy to see in the region, noted at most birding locations we visited.
Swallow	Common and widespread bird in Spain.
House Martin	Common and widespread bird in Spain.
Pied Wagtail	Noted.
Nightingale	Singing in Monfragüe national park.
Black Redstart	Seen at Monfragüe castle and La Tajadilla.
Stonechat	Seen at Talavan & Embalse de Talavan.
Mistle Thrush	Noted.
Blackbird	Noted.
Blue Rock Thrush	Excellent views at Pena Falcon and Portilla del Tietar, also seen at Monfragüe Castle, as well as at Serradilla
Subalpine Warbler	Seen at La Tajadilla and Villarreal de San Carlos as well as at Portilla del Tietar. Also noted at Serradilla.
Western Orphean Warbler	Noted at the viewpoint at Portilla del Tietar.
Zitting Cisticola	Excellent views at Saucedilla.
Reed Warbler	Noted only at Saucedilla.
Cetti's Warbler	Noted only at Saucedilla.
Great Tit	Noted.
Long-tailed Tit	Birds here of the race <i>irbii</i> noted at Portilla del Tietar where a family party showed well.
Iberian Grey Shrike	Quite easy to see on the plains in the region.
Woodchat Shrike	Easy to see in the region.
Jay	Noted.
Jackdaw	Noted.
Raven	Noted.
Spotless Starling	Easy to see across most of Spain, though biggest flocks witnessed in Madrid.
Golden Oriole	Seen at Villarreal de San Carlos
House Sparrow	Noted.
Spanish Sparrow	Relatively easy to see in the region.
Chaffinch	Noted.
Hawfinch	A bird that is quite easy to see and hear in Spain, noted at Villarreal de San Carlos, Portilla del Tietar, and Monfragüe castle.



	Birds were even present in the trees surrounding Saucedilla.
Linnet	Noted.
Goldfinch	Noted.
Greenfinch	Noted.
Serin	Seen at Portilla del Tietar and Monfragüe castle.
Corn Bunting	Abundant in most agricultural areas due to the lack of intensive farming practices.
Rock Bunting	Excellent views at Portilla del Tietar.



*Little Owl - May 2017 - ©Nikola Zalas*

