



Sunrise Birding LLC  
www.sunrisebirding.com

# Grand Spain Trip Report

August 31- September 14, 2024

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**Photos by:** Frank Gallo (FG), Lori Kelter Herfurth (LH), Sherry Kelter (SK)

**Day one: Aug 31, Seville:** The group gathered outside the Only You Hotel, (formally, Ayre Hotel) a little before 2 pm., loaded the vans and headed for the Doñana. Our targets were White-head and Marbled Ducks. Our first stop produced **Red-crested**



and Common **Pochards** (LH).

Later, we found six White-headed Ducks, and two

Marbled Ducks perched on a close Sandbar a pond. A surprise for the area was a Red Kite. We also scored a Lesser Kestrel and a **Melodious Warbler** (LH) that led the group down the road and gave stunning views. Another surprise was the



discovery that in transit, the back of the van had popped open and Franks's bag had gone AWOL.

We continued south through the heart of Doñana National Park where we watched Booted Eagle interact with a **Short-toed Snake-Eagle** (LH). We



stopped briefly at saltpans where a

Gull-billed Tern was seen by some, before heading south to our hotel for the next two nights. We enjoyed a tasty welcome dinner at our lovely hotel, **Mesón de Sancho** (FG), with its beautiful and birdy gardens.



## Day Two: Sept 1: Algeciras-Observatorio de Algarrobo (a.m.).



Today, we hit the Weather-Lotto. Blocking southerly winds over the last week finally went west, then northwest, and the raptors, storks, and bee-eaters moved. Heavy fog to the West in the morning forced us to go east to **Algeciras-Observatorio de Algarrobo (FG)** where we were generously rewarded. The "flood gates" opened and

the birds streamed through by the hundreds. By the time we left, more than 2600 European Honey Buzzards, 1050 Black Kites, **550 White Storks (FG)**, our first Black Stork, and a nice variety of other raptors, including 2 Peregrine Falcons, Montague's and Marsh Harriers, 500 Booted, and 80 Short-toed Snake Eagles passed over us. It was quite a spectacle to behold. To add to the fun, Chris Mills, an old

friend of Julian Hough's was in attendance, and we enjoyed his company and knowledge.



In the afternoon, we moved west. Our traditional lunch stop at Huerta Grande was full, so we continued to the overlook at Observatorio de Cazalla, where we ate lunch. The first bird we saw, was a young **Egyptian Vulture (FG)** that cruised past the front of our van at eye level, so close we could almost touch it. We watched

as another 500 white Storks circled over the valley, occasionally drifting directly overhead, and had splendid views of several close Black Storks another Montague's Harrier, quite a few Egyptian and Griffon Vultures, and curious young Black Kites that kept buzzing the promontory. The huge prize was an African **Rüppell's Vulture (FG)** that soared past close, then circled with the Griffons until we left. Frank may have mentioned its presence as it went by...lol.



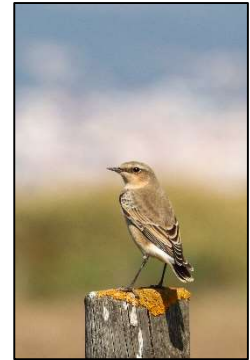
In the early afternoon, we drove to the rice fields of La Janda. Always productive, even with the drought where we found most of our targets, including many White Storks. Highlights included 2 beautiful European Rollers perched on power poles, **Black-shouldered Kites (FG)**, one of which devoured prey on an irrigation machine, **Marsh Harrier (LH)**, and a rare dark morph Montague's Harrier hunting over the marsh. Our stop by the river produced a slew of European Bee-eaters perched on the wires and in trees, little Common Waxbills, and lovely European



Turtle Doves beside the road. A few lucky folks saw a male Western Orphean Warbler feeding with a Willow and Common Reed Warbler. After checking for nightjars, we went for another lovely meal at our hotel.

### Day 3: Sept 2: Tarifa to La Serena:

After another tasty breakfast and birding from the veranda overlooking the gardens, which produced views of Eurasian Blackbird, a large family of Sardinian Warblers, a Short-toed Treecreeper, and a Hawfinch for those who lingered, we headed to the coastal overlook at the International Bird Center. A few Eurasian Whimbrel, Crested Larks, and our first **Northern Wheatears** (FG) entertained us as we searched and found Scopoli's (Cory's) Shearwaters feeding near a buoy.



Our next stop was the golf course on the way to Vejer de la Frontera, but the course gate was closed. We moved on to a roost at La Frontera, but it was unoccupied, then continued to the Trebejena area in search of the mythical **Rufous-tailed Bush-Robin** (FG). Through a miracle, and Sherry's Eagle eyes, we found one resting in the shade of an olive tree. A young Woodchat Shrike sat out for us, and a Melodious Warbler played hide-and-seek in the roadside weeds.

After our successful experience with the Bush-Robin, we headed to lunch in the nearby town of Trebujena-Pueblo where we borrowed some tables and enjoyed watching the antics of the local chickens and geese. After lunch, we headed to Hotel Trajano, in Zelemea de la Serena, the home of the blue G&T, with a stop at the mall along the way.



### Day 4: Sept 3: La Trajano, north of Compenario (bell tower) agricultural lands, then to la Serena plains for Black-bellied Sand Grouse. Lunch at the hermitage, then on to Benquerencia for Bonelli's Eagle and Black Wheatear.

This morning, we traversed the arid farmlands of Camino de Campanario in search of Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, partridge, bustards, and other open plain species. Highlights included our first views of Iberian Grey Shrike, **Little Owl** (FG), and both Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse flying and feeding near a watering hole. At one point, 2 Black-bellied, and 1 Pin-tailed flew by together, close. We managed views of the elusive Common Quail, lovely Red-legged Partridge, and diminutive Spectacled Warblers. The landscape, though stark, was breathtaking. A drive by a small stream culvert gave us great looks at Red-rumped Swallows.



We Enjoyed lunch at a shaded hermitage site, Cabeza del Buey -- Santuario de Belén, where ancient elms still stand. Willow Warblers were feeding in trees full of pendulous Spanish Sparrow nests, and European Blackbirds hopped on the lawns.

After Lunch, we returned to Camino de Campanario to continue our search for Bustards, Stone Curlews, and larks.

We had more good looks at **Red-legged Partridge** (LH), Common Quail, Greater Short-toed and **Calandra Larks** (LH),



a flock of Common Greenshanks, and a Ruff. Seeing a young Spanish



Imperial Eagle soaring over the plains was a treat. Late in the day, at Benquerencia de la Serena, we scanned the mountains for Bonelli's Eagles without success, but we were rewarded with nice views of a male Mouflon on the hillside. At the small village of Pueblo y Castillo, where we

squeezed down a narrow street to view exposed cliffs, we were treated to great views of Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Alpine Swifts, and an adult and immature Bonelli's Eagle which cruised down the ridge towards the mountains we just left!

#### **Day 5: Sept 4: Trujillo / Belén / Embalse de Alcollarin / Monfragüe**

Today, we journeyed through the plains then headed to Monfragüe, stopping at the huge Alcollarín reservoir, and to see the majestic Trujillo Castle.

After breakfast, we headed north of Compañero in search of Bustards in an area on the plains where there once were old mines. The bustards were real bustards and eluded us, but we had nice looks at Iberian Gray Shrikes.

Lunch was at the enormous Alcollarin Reservoir in a lovely, forested area near the upper dam.

We hit the jackpot on shorebirds, grebes, herons, and waterfowl, including seeing our first Great Crested Grebes, **Graylag Geese** (LH), and Northern Lapwings! We watched a couple of lovely kingfishers from the boardwalk chasing one another and had nice views of Great Cormorants and Black Storks. From an overlook, midway down the reservoir, we counted scores of shorebirds, Great Crested Grebes, and ducks, enjoyed close views of a Thekla Lark, and saw our first Osprey and Little Stints.



We then headed to our scenic hotel in Monfragüe. Our first flocks of Iberian Magpies crossed the road near the hotel.

### Day 6: Sept 5: Monfragüe

This morning, we first visited the cliffs at Gypsy Leap (Peña Falcón/Salto del Gitano) where Frank spotted a Rock Bunting and **Blue Rock Thrush** (FG) as we were walking to the overlook. At the overlook, a male **Black Redstart** (LH) popped in for a visit, a pair of Blue Rock Thrushes perched below us, and six Black Storks landed on a rock outcrop below us and in the open for all to enjoy. A couple of Egyptian Vultures perched atop a tree on a nearby hillside and a Peregrine dove on our first Golden Eagle above the pinnacle!! It was a nice morning.



We continued to the blind at Portilla del Tietiar where we ate lunch and had amazing views of Cinereous Vultures and a young Bonelli's Eagle soaring over the pinnacle. A Eurasian Jay put on a show repeatedly coming to drink at the riverside across from the blind with a Eurasian Blackbird. A couple more Subalpine and Sardinian Warblers in the bushes beside the blind and a Blue Rock Thrush across the way.

We drove to Arrocampo Reservoir where we visited quite a few locations around it, but it was hot, and few birds showed except for 175 Great Cormorants roosting on poles. We did see a couple of Red-rumped Swallows and heard our only Water Rail near a blind at the north end.

Late in the afternoon, we went to Jaraicejo-Meseta de Deleitosa, an area with scrubby thickets where we had wonderful looks at least 6 Dartford Warblers. It took us a while to get them to tee up, but we all had looks in the end. An Iberian Gray Shrike, a Booted and a Snake Eagle, and a Common Raven all teed up to watch us from the power poles. We left for dinner at our hotel.

**Day 7: Sept 6: Our Big Travel Day:** In the early morning, we birded along the roadside at Jaraicejo--Ermita de los Hitos within Monfragüe. It was quite a birdy morning; we enjoyed wonderful views of both Iberian and Eurasian Magpies feeding on the ground among the cork trees. A Mistle Thrush stood out in the open for all to enjoy, and 3 Long-tailed Tits bombed into the trees beside us on the road. An adult Spanish Eagle flew by in the distance, and a Hawfinch flew over the group showing the white tip to its tail. There was a Short-toed Treecreeper, a Chaffinch, quite a few **Pied Flycatchers** (FG), and at least 3 Wood Larks, one of which, sang from atop a dead snag. It was a rewarding way to start the day before our journey to Belchite.



We saw quite a few raptors along the drive, including many Booted Eagles, Common Kestrels, and a few Buzzards. We had lunch at a roadside restaurant in Castilla-La Mancha, where, from the veranda, we saw 2 Cinereous Vultures circling with Griffon's across the street. At one of our gas/rest stops, we saw an Iberian Gray Shrike behind the station.

We arrived early at our hotel in the quaint farming town of Belchite and had an early dinner to beat the crowds that were starting to gather for the start of a festival the next day.



**Day 8: Sept 7:** After breakfast, we set off for the rugged plains of El Planeron, the Dupont's Lark reserve. We didn't see any at our first stop, but we had great looks at 2 Spectacled Warblers that teed up on

bushes along the roadside a bit further along. There had been a lot of rain, and a flooded area produced 7 Greenshanks feeding with a Ruff (Reeve). Along the road, we also saw Greater Short-toed, Calandra, and Mediterranean Short-toed (flew by), and Crested Lark, and few Red-legged Partridges, and **Eurasian Hoopoe** (LH) on the hillsides. We finally hit the Lotto when a

**Dupont's Lark** (LH) flew in and landed 10 feet from the first van. Eventually, we all had good looks at it as it ran by... but several folks wanted to take another try at it the following day.



We then drove through some alfalfa fields, the last area we'd seen Bustards in the region, to a pine grove beside a pig farm where we searched for migrants before walking the adjacent fields in hopes of seeing Stone Curlews. Sadly, with all the water, the Curlews weren't concentrated in any given area. The pine grove produced our first Common Nightingale.

We had lunch at Camino Natural del Ebro (Mejana Capera--Quinto (Zaragoza), where we walked along the road near the river, and had nice views of Cetti's Warbler near the bridge, and a variety of other birds, including Garden Warbler, Common Reed Warbler, and a Blackcap. Another Hawfinch flew over, as well. The highlight was a territorial Wryneck that came in calling, flew all around us, but never showed itself.

In the mid-afternoon we took another drive through **El Planeron** (FG) hoping to find Stone Curlews and to get a better look at Mediterranean Short-toed Larks. As we drove in, a Stock Dove flushed from a field and flew across the road in front of us. It's easy to miss this stocky dove, so we were thrilled to see it. Two Green Sandpipers joined our flock of now 12 Greenshanks in the flooded area, and we saw an assortment of larks feeding in the fields.



Late in the day, we visited the ruins of the **old city of Belchite** (FG) destroyed during the Spanish revolution. It's a somber reminder of the atrocities of war. Perched on the old church spire were 2 Blue Rock Thrushes and some roosting Craig Martins.

We returned to our hotel for dinner arriving just as the festivities were kicking off, and as the crown was being passed on to the new

festival queen. The entire town had turned out, so after dinner, we joined the festivities and watched the parade of floats passing by outside. It was a joyous if raucous event and only ended the following morning when the bells rang for 7 a.m. mass. There was quite the parade of hungover revilers wandering home at dawn...Even with the late night, for me, it was a privilege to witness and be a part of a local tradition that few from outside this tiny town will ever see.

**Day 9: Sept 8:** As we'd seen Dupont's Lark yesterday, we left again after breakfast for El Planeron. We returned to the first site for Dupont's Lark from the day before, and before I had a chance to lift my binoculars to scan, Bobbie looked out and spotted a Dupont's Lark standing beside a bush 10 feet from our car! That never happens. This is a bird that can take hours to get



a look at, and we were watching one before I'd even turned off the car. This proves that miracles do happen, and that Bobbie has sharp eyes.

Shortly after, we had nice looks at a Mediterranean Short-toed Lark in a field beside the road, and the Stock Dove from yesterday was again in the area.

After we had our fill of the Plains, we headed toward la Serena in

the Pyrenees. Our first stop was a streamside aspen grove that's been reliable for Iberian Green Woodpeckers through the years. Although there was plenty of evidence of their presence, none appeared. We continued to the Monastery of Juan de la Pena with stops to photograph the scenic views. At the new Monastery, Cristian took the group for a walk while Frank watched the vehicles. When the group returned, Frank was watching a small mixed feeding flock of Coal and **Crested Tits** (LH), a Short-toed Tree Creeper, Firecrest, and **Nuthatches** (LH), and was trying to find a woodpecker that was tapping nearby. We watched the flock as it moved through, and eventually located the feeding woodpecker, a Great Spotted, spotted by Sherry high in a tree. A few saw a European Robin.



On our way out, several Black Redstarts were on the Monastery's wall and White Wagtails were on the lawns. At the old monastery we had a great look at a pair of Wrens beside the road.

There were several Red Kites, Carrion Crows, and Buzzards seen on the drive to la Serena. After checking into the Hotel de Archer, we enjoyed a wonderful meal.



**Day 10: Sept 9: Hecho & Refugio de Gabardito:** Today, we birded along the main road up the Hecho Valley before turning onto a side valley to the **Refugio de Gabardito**. Along the main road, we ran into a mixed flock that included Blackcaps, Great, and Blue Tits, and a Pied Flycatcher. At Gabardito, we birded around the “rainbow” clearing (FG) before splitting into two groups. In the clearing, we



had stellar looks at Citril Finches, Serins, a Mistle Thrush nestled in the grass, and a lovely Wryneck perched in a bush in the valley. The lead group hiked to the Wallcreeper cliffs. The second group followed, stopping about halfway to the cliffs at a clearing where they encountered a mixed flock of Crested, Blue, Great, Long-tailed, and Coal Tits along with a Firecrest and Short-toed Treecreeper in the forest just before the clearing. The flock reappeared in the clearing and was joined by a few Chaffinches and Robin gave great views. While we waited for the first group to return, we watched Jackdaws and Red-billed Choughs flying around the cliffs and Chamois high on the hillside, which the first group saw upon their return. The **Wallcreeper** (LH) trek was successful. They found 2! and 2 **Lammergeier's** (LH)! It was a delightful morning.



We returned to the main road and up Hecho Valley stopping at a lovely coffee shop for a break. Periodic stops along the road to scan the river for dippers and wagtails produced nice views of several Gray Wagtails feeding on the rocks, and farther up the valley we ran across our first **White-throated Dippers** (FG) and enjoyed watching several jumping in and out of the water as they fed. One sat on a rock near the bridge and posed for photographs!

In the alpine meadows in the upper valley, we spotted more Chamois on the peaks and managed to see Linnets, and a male Yellowhammer that flew by the group. Bobbie spotted what turned out to be an Iberian Green Woodpecker in a distant treetop, and a small bush and thistle patch attracted our only Marsh Tit for the trip, a Blackcap, and several Goldfinch before a bold





Sparrowhawk tried to eat them. What a finish to a lovely day!

### Day 11: Sept 10: Anso Valley to Roncal Valley to Ski Resort - Pierre de San Martin, France.



Today we drove up the Roncal Valley. On the way, a Great-spotted Woodpecker flew between the two vans and landed in a pine beside the road, but disappeared before the other van could return. Shortly after, we were treated to the spectacle of a Golden Eagle feeding on a large mammal on the hill beside the road.

Farther along on the road in France, we found a couple of Water Pipits and a Tree two Red-billed Coughs, a

Citril Finch and several Linnets feeding along the roadside.

It became quite foggy as we drove into France where we searched for Alpine Accentor and Dunnocks in a meadow above the road but were shut down by the thickening fog but not before two Yellow-billed Coughs appeared briefly over the cliffs. We did have nice looks at Linnets, Northern Wheatears, and Black Redstarts. While we were enjoying lunch and were entertained by a **huge flock of sheep** (FG) with bells ringing that descended onto the road stopping traffic as they paraded past us and several motorcyclists.

We continued dodging the fog at our next stop in the ski village in Pierre de San Martin, where we came across a mixed flock with our first Common Chiffchaff, a Citril Finch, Chaffinch, Crested, and Coal Tits feeding in a small roadside pine stand.



Driving back through the Roncal Valley, we were treated to great views of Red Kites, Buzzards, Booted Eagles, Whinchats, at least six **Red-backed Shrikes** (LH), and **White Wagtails** (LH) perched on the backs of sheep.



Late in the day, we stopped at an observation deck in the Anso Valley to scan the peeks for Lammergeiers and coughs and scored a single Lammergeier which flew across the closest peek with a huge mixed flock of mostly Red-billed, and several Yellow-billed Coughs circling over it.

### Day 12: Sept 11: La Serena to the Ebro Delta (travel day):

After breakfast, we left for the Ebro Delta. Our first stop was back at the Monastery of Juan de la Pena for another try at the Black Woodpecker. Wonderfully, one flew over us, calling, as we exited the vans. It flew around us, landing briefly, before flying over again. What a treat!

After a quick stop to view the cliffs of Riglos we continued to **Loarre Castle (FG)**. We parked on



the hillside and birded the hillside pines where we had brief looks at a Western Bonelli's Warbler, and nice views of Crested and Coal Tits, Firecrests, Wood Larks, and a Short-toed Treecreeper. During lunch, several people explored the castle.

Our last stop before



Ebro was a roost site for Eurasian Eagle Owl; one was home. What a great end to the day!!

We arrived at the lovely Delta Hotel with time to rest before enjoying our first of many wonderful meals in the hotel restaurant.

**Day 13: Sept 12: Ebro Delta Day 1:** Today we explored the Ebro Delta. Our first stop at a



recently plowed rice field produced dozens of feeding Lesser Black-backed, **Black-headed Gulls (FG)**, and Whiskered Terns along with more than 550 **Glossy Ibis (FG)**. Other stops in the rice fields produced a beautiful



European Golden Plover, Whimbrels, a Common Snipe, Little Stints, Black-winged Stilts, Wood, and Green Sandpipers, and a slew of other shorebirds, gulls, terns, and waders. We saw a close Squacco Heron on the edge of a canal, and then spent time searching the Sod Farms where hundreds of Yellow Wagtails, and



Little, and Common Ringed Plovers were feeding along with at least two **Temminck's Stints! (LH)**

After leaving the sod farms, we enjoyed close views of two young **Purple Herons (LH)**, and a couple more Squacco Herons. By noon, we were on the tower at Torre de l'Alfaca where large numbers of waders, shorebirds, flamingos, and ducks, including Green-winged Teal, Shovelers, and Gadwall, congregated. We





saw several Caspian Terns and enjoyed nice views of Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbills, Black-winged Stilts, and a flock of 68 Collared Pratincoles that rested on one of the dikes. What an amazingly weird and beautiful shorebird.



We ate lunch at Riet Vell, where 55 Alpine Swifts flew over the SEO Birdlife building. Our time in the park's wonderful blind produced incredible views of several **Western Swamp Hens** (LH), Eurasian Moorhens, coots, Little Grebe, Greater Flamingo, Pied Avocet, Common Reed Warbler, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and **Eurasian Tree Sparrows** (LH).

Next, on the sand spit that leads to the salt factory, we had great views of our three targets - Slender-billed, Audouin's, and **Mediterranean Gulls** (SK). The nearby Plataforma del Trabucador lagoons were full of terns and shorebirds. We watched Sandwich, Caspian, Common, Whiskered, and Little Terns feeding and roosting on sandbars in the lagoons near a Common



Shelduck. Kentish, Little Ringed, Common Ringed, and Black-bellied Plovers, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank, Whimbrel, Sanderling, Little Stint, and a feast of other shorebirds and waders were roosting and feeding in the saltpans.

Through the afternoon, we accumulated more shorebirds, including Wood Sandpiper, Ruff, Common Snipe, Spotted Redshank, and **Eurasian Curlew** (LH), and found another Temmink's Stint. One stop produced 77 Little Stints feeding in a flooded rice field. Another field held 35 Ruff, 4 Spotted Redshank, Black-winged Stilts, and 6 Bar-tailed Godwits.

We ended the day at Torre de l'Alfacada where we heard a Siberian Bluethroat, and witnessed the spectacle of **3000+ Glossy Ibis**, and hundreds of herons and egrets going to roost in the light of the setting sun! Another lovely way to finish the day.

At the hotel, we met for another excellent dinner and to do the list at 8 p.m.



**Day 14: Sept 13: Ebro day 2:** This morning, we continued to explore the Ebro Delta. Our first bird of note was a Squacco Heron feeding in an irrigation ditch. At the beach, Playa de la Delta de Ebro we found another Audouin's Gull and watched two **Honey Buzzards** (LH) fly in off the water and by us up the coast. They are enormous.



A slew of herons, egrets, and

shorebirds were seen on our drive to the north shore where we found a **Kingfisher** (LH) perched along a canal. After

stopping to watch **fishermen harvesting oysters and cockles** (FG), we continued to a boat ramp where a **Pied Avocet** (SK) greeted us in the parking lot. A flock of eleven Bar-tailed Godwits was at a site overlooking the



bay, feeding with five Greenshanks, and a Common Redshank backed by a huge flock of **Greater Flamingoes** (FG). Eleven Slender-billed Gulls, a Common, and a Caspian Tern roosted on a nearby Sandbar with Black-headed Gulls and Ruddy Turnstones.



At Cap Roig, we spotted fourteen

Shags roosting on distant rocks, before we headed off for lunch back at the hotel. After a little afternoon break and searching for Little Bittern and owls on the property, we headed to a migrant trap on the coast in the late afternoon. We found several Common Redstarts, a few Whinchats, a Common Nightengale, a Tree Pipit, and a slew of Pied Flycatchers, and we had great looks at a perched Greater



Whitethroat. The surprise star of the stop was a Scops Owl that flushed and was seen in flight.

After an amazing **paella farewell dinner** (FG) back at the hotel, a few folks joined Frank for a night hike around the property and heard an obliging Little Bittern at the pond



**Day 15: Sept 14: Ebro – Airport:** After breakfast, Frank and Frank went to the carwash to clean the rental, while Cristian and the group loaded the vans and birded around the pond, where three young **Penduline Tits** (Lori) became the last new bird for the tour... or so we thought... On our drive to the airport, we paused to scan a flock of 50+ Black-tailed Godwits, when Cristian spotted the hybrid **Western Reef Heron x Little Egret** (Lori) that has been present. We got photographs and showed it to some other birders, then continued to the airport. It was a nice end to a fun and productive trip. Thank you, everyone!

