

# Birding Madrid and Castille-La Mancha:



Participants: Ed.O'Hara/Luis Sitges

Date: Thurs 1<sup>st</sup>/Fri 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept 2016

Guide: Luis Sitges of  Birding Trekking & Nature.

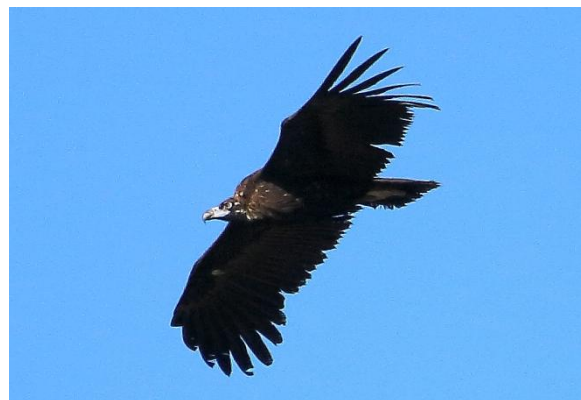
I went on a family holiday in late August 2016 to **Madrid**, a city I am now very fond of, due to the excellent birding both in and around the city, and surrounding countryside. My wife and daughter have the hotel pool and shopping in the Grand Via as their primary pursuits, which leaves me free to go birding in the city parks, of which there are several. It is often easier to see the birds here than out in the country as they are so used to people and the city environment.

**Thursday 1 September: SW Madrid Province:** Weather sunny/33°C Morning

We left the hotel at 07:30 and drove to a wooded valley, situated SW of the city. The target species were Golden Eagle, Black Vulture and Spanish Imperial Eagle. We parked at a car park beside a dam which provides fresh water to the city. The valley was covered in Pine and Holm Oak trees and in the morning sunlight provided a wonderful back drop to the lake. **Tree Sparrow, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Redstart, Goldfinch, Lapwing, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Serin, Linnet, Grey Heron, Mallard, White Wagtail, Robin, Kingfisher, Crag Martin, Barn Swallow, House Martin, Nuthatch, Rock Bunting, Willow Warbler and Red-rumped Swallow** were seen as we walked along the edge of the lake. After 20 minutes a bird appeared on a ridge behind us, and Luis recognised immediately as a juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. The bird eventually landed on a pine tree across the valley, giving us excellent views through the telescope. Then the first of several **Black Vultures** appeared over the woods, giving very close views of the bird. Only twenty minutes gone and we had all target species at close hand, amazing and more; two **Golden Eagles** joined the Vultures in a fly-past! It doesn't get much better than this. Oh forgot to mention the **Griffon Vultures**, they were everywhere coming from all directions, presumably a food source was somewhere in the woods. Lastly a **Bonelli's Eagle** made a brief appearance.



Sub-Adult Spanish Imperial Eagle



Black Vulture

We then headed on to our next site which was a picnic area beside a lake. Here we got excellent views of **Azure-winged Magpie, Spotless Starling, Black Redstart, Redstart, Crested Tit and Grey Wagtail**. A great morning's birding so we stopped for lunch.

Restarted at 14:30 but already we could see dark clouds gathering in the north west and headed to our last site of the day a **Griffon Vulture** colony which was close to a main road. Here we got superb views of adults and young together.



**Adult Griffon Vultures**



**Juvenile Griffon Vulture**

## **Friday 2 September: Castille-La Mancha: Sunshine 35C and hot!**

An early start, we left Madrid at 07:30 and headed south for 100km, arriving at our first destination, just as the sun was rising to give some bright morning light. We encountered three **Great Bustard** at a considerable distance from the road but using the telescope, we got some excellent views.



**Great Bustard**



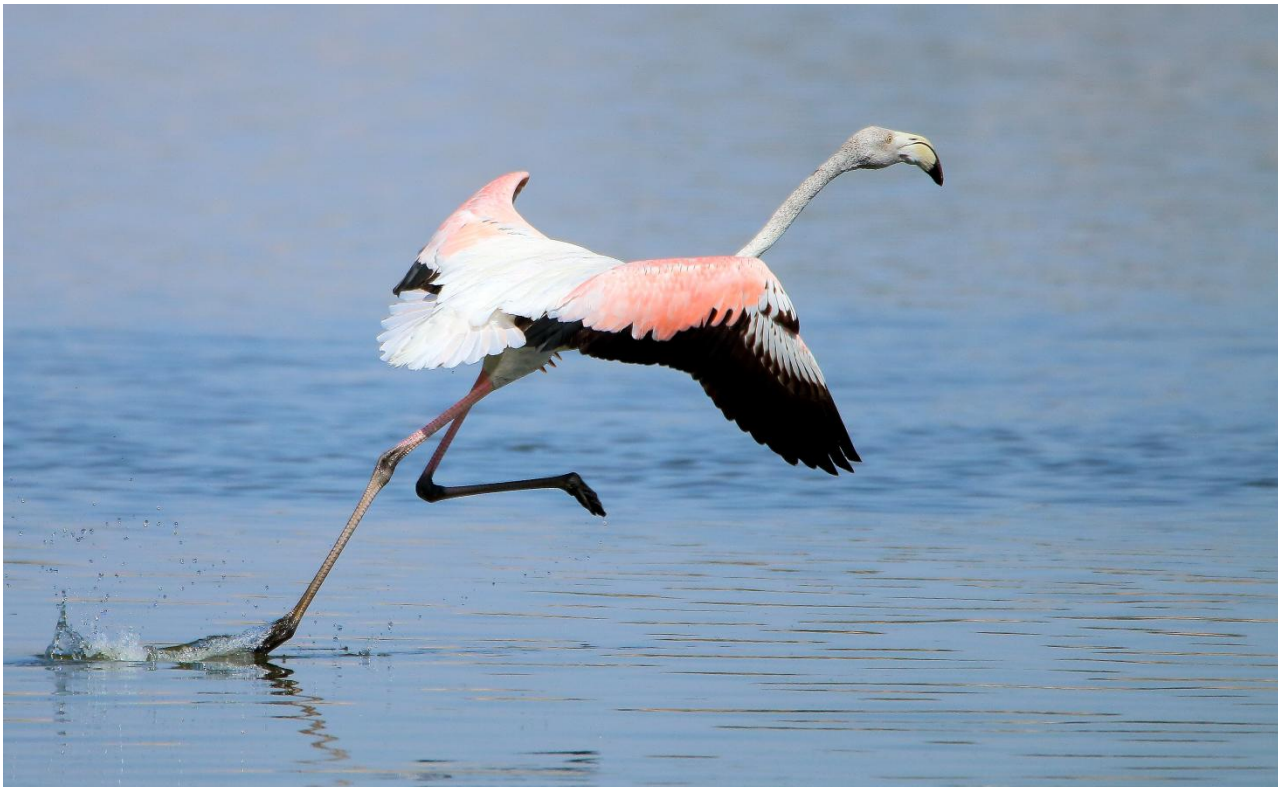
**Little Bustard**

Amazingly as we were watching the birds, two **Little Bustard** appeared out of the cropped field behind the Great Bustards, a good start to the day. Continuing along the road a **Marsh Harrier** glided along the olive trees next to the road startling **Crested** and **Short-toed Larks** in the process, the **Spotless Starlings** weren't that keen on hanging around either. A farmyard further on produced several **Little Bustards** feeding among the flock of sheep. A few kilometres along the same road, we came across a pair of **Lesser Kestrel**, sitting in the middle of a harrowed field. Obviously on migration, as the local colony we visited earlier had no birds present, long gone by now in early September.

The next two sites we visited were a disappointment, due to lack of any surface water, although we did get a few birds, namely **Hen Harrier, Turtle Dove, Short-toed Eagle** and **Yellow Wagtail** *ssp. iberiae*.

However the best was kept to the last, as we say in English, a reserve called **Tablas de Daimiel National Park**. This is a wetland on the La Mancha plain, a mainly arid area in the province of Ciudad Real. With an area of 3000 hectares, the park is the smallest of Spain's fifteen national parks. It is a listed *Ramsar* Convention site and the core of the *Biosphere reserve Mancha Humeda*. The importance of the reserve was obvious on our trip; it was the only one with any degree of surface water. As we approached the reserve

the first thing to strike you was the hundreds of **Flamingo** juveniles and adults in their glowing pink plumage.



#### **Adult Flamingo taking off**

The number of birds on the marsh was staggering but one in particular stood out **White-headed Duck**, there were at least 100+ birds, I had never seen so many before in my entire life, as was present in this reserve.



#### **White-headed Duck, a portion of the flock!**

In two hours birding we saw a fantastic variety of birds, every moment there was something flying in or out of the reserve. Here is a synopsis of what was seen: **Osprey, Glossy Ibis, Squacco Heron, Whiskered Tern, Whinchat, Willow Warbler, Reed Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Turtle Dove, Ferruginous Duck, Booted Eagle, Woodchat Shrike, White Stork, Black-necked Grebe, Little Grebe, Great-crested Grebe, Bee-eater, Barn Swallow, Grey Wagtail, Purple Swamphen, Common Buzzard, Black-headed Gull, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Little Bittern, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Yellow Wagtail *ssp. flava*, Black-tailed Godwit, Red-crested Pochard, Stock Dove, Moorhen, Coot, Northern Pochard, Mallard, Teal, and Gadwall.**



**Reed Warbler**



**Purple Swamphen**



**Ruddy Darter**



**Emperor Dragonfly**



**Glossy Ibis**



**Whinchat**



**Squacco Heron**

Not only was the bird life amazing, but the insect life matched it, particularly the Dragonflies (although there were some insects you wished weren't there): The Dragonflies were just amazing as they carried out their courtship display right in front of the hide. This is indeed the jewel in the crown of Castilla-La Mancha's reserves. As it was 200 km back to Madrid, we couldn't stay as long as I would have liked as I had a plane to catch, early next morning

Again my thanks to Luis for another two wonderful days birding, as always he was great company and I would recommend [Birding Trekking & Nature](#) to anyone visiting Madrid for birding purposes.



**Sub Adult Spanish Imperial Eagle**



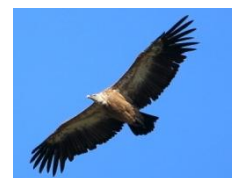
**Zitting Cisticola**



**Osprey**



**Adult Flamingo**



**Griffon Vulture**

