

ANDALUCÍA, EXTREMADURA AND GIBRALTAR 4.-14.1.2002

PARTICIPANTS: ANTTI KAUSE, SAMPO KUNTTU, RAMI LINDROOS AND KALLE RAINIO

The weather was all the time very pleasant with cold nights and sunny days. The winds were mostly eastern; rain disturbed bird watching only once.

4.1. Friday: Andalucía, Arrival to Malaga at 17:00

Short visit to Playa Campo de Golf. Sea watching produced 35 Balearic Shearwaters (*Puffinus mauretanicus*), 8 Arctic Skuas (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), and 8 Gannets (*Morus bassanus*). Around the eucalyptus trees at the golf course we saw 2 Ring-necked Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*). There were also some large nests of Monk Parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*).

5.1. Saturday: Andalucía, Malaga area

We spent the morning at Torre del Mar, East of Malaga. The hard SE wind was favourable for seawatching: lots of Balearic Shearwaters (200), a Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) and 20 Gannets passing by. A total of 200 Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), coming from the roosting sites also passed us along the shore.

A few kilometres west from Torre del Mar, near the nude beach, a surprisingly high number of Mediterranean Gulls was observed (total of the morning rising to 1500); 50 Balearic Shearwaters and 15 Gannets were seen.

Next we drove 10 km north to the nearest hills at Vinuela. A Black Wheatear (*Oenanthe leucura*), a Little Owl (*Athene noctua*), 3 Rock Sparrows (*Petronia petronia*) and an unidentified Swift (*Apus apus/pallidus*) were observed.

At the dams of Los Romanos, A Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), 6000 Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) and only a single Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*). In fact, Herring Gull was surprisingly rare at the Mediterranean side of the sea.

The afternoon was spent again at Malaga, and both Ring-necked (6) and Monk Parakeets (3) were observed. In the evening, we left for Extremadura and drove a long way north towards Cordoba. The only Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) of the trip was hunting at the fields. We spent the night in a hostel a few kilometres north from Cordoba.

6.1. Sunday: Extremadura, Plains of La Serena – Guadalupe

Cold and sunny day with easterly winds. Frost at the morning.

The first stop of a day at the fields just before Hinojosa del Dugue produced the first Red Kites (*Milvus milvus*), 70 Cranes (*Grus grus*) and several flocks (total 200) of Calandra Larks (*Melanocorypha calandra*). Before La Serena we took a couple of short stops with First Red-legged Partridges (*Alectoris rufa*), four Hoopoes (*Upupa epops*) and a flock of 72 Cattle Egrets. White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) were already at nests displaying in the crispy morning. At La Serena from 10 AM onwards. We drove along the straight road crossing the steppe area (road A in the map p. 278 in Garcia & Paterson) with good results: 68 (a flock of 41) Great bustards (*Otis tarda*), a huge flock of 950 Little Bustards (*Tetrax tetrax*), some small flocks of Black-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles orientalis*) and a nice flock of 16 Pintail Sandgrouse (*P. alchata*). There were also good numbers of Red Kites and wintering Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) and Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis apricaria*).

After Serena we moved gradually to the north. In Madrigalejo area we saw 200 Cranes, 20 Black Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*), 40 Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) and a Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraetus fasciatus*). The first flock of Azure-winged magpies (*Cyanopica cyanus*) crossed the road. The day's total of Red Kites rose to 65! We spend the night in a nice hostel about 2 km south of Guadalupe, where a Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*) was displaying in the starry evening.

7.1. Monday: Extremadura, Guadalupe – Monfragüe

Another sunny but crispy day. We began the day in a small creek close to Guadalupe with Short-toed Treecreepers (*Certhia brachydactyla*) and Green Woodpeckers (*Picus viridis*). At the city of Guadalupe, there was about 180 Crag Martins (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) sun-bathing in the walls of the monastery, where Kristoffer Columbus himself had visited some 500 years ago. After this we drove north across Sierra de Guadalupe (road EX-118) making short stops which produced more Short-toed Treecreeper and Azure-winged Magpies, two Firecrests (*Regulus ignicapillus*) and some Griffon Vultures.

At Bohonal de Ibor, Vultures became unavoidable for the rest of the day: all the time there was a Griffon or a Black Vulture to be seen. Also White Storks were common. At Peraleda de la Mata we stopped to take pictures of the snow-tipped mountains of Sierra de Gredos and there it was: the Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*)! We watched the graceful gliding of the bird for several minutes during which also another *Elanus* appeared and a Black Vulture soared above us.



The rest of the day was spent in Monfragüe. The place did not fail us – it was more spectacular than any of us could ever imagine. Tens and tens of Griffons soaring low above us with some Black Vultures among them; a total of five (!) Spanish Imperial Eagles (*Aquila adalberti*); a Peregrine chasing Ravens (*Corvus corax*) from an apparent nesting site; Bonelli's Eagle; 2 Red-billed Choughs (*Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*); the first identified Thekla Larks (*Galerida theklae*) of our trip. At dusk we saw 4 Little Owls close to Trujillo along the road. Night at Torremegia.

8.1. Tuesday: Andalucía, Guadiana – Marismas del Odiel

We started the day with a quite a long drive to Ayamonte via Sevilla with only a few stops. A flock of 69 Azure-winged Magpies and a Black-shouldered Kite were the highlights of the morning. We arrived to Guadiana Estuary at 10:30 AM. First we did some seawatching but the continuing easterly winds made it quite quiet – only 2 Gannets, 60 Black Scoters (*Melanitta nigra*) and some Sandwich Terns (*Sterna sandwicensis*). The Estuary itself appeared to be quite difficult to observe. There is a seven kilometre long walking-trail through the marshes with hides but we did not have time to walk it. Nevertheless, we saw some waders: 200 Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*), 60 Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*) etc. and 3 Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella rufescens*). So we decided to go to Huelva, Marismas del Odiel. This proved to be an excellent place for waders. We watched the muddy beach at low tide from "The central causeway" (Garcia & Paterson, p. 57, C). There was a good view to the tidal zone with hundreds of waders, mostly Dunlins, Grey Plovers (*Pluvialis squatarola*) and Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica*). The only rain of our trip ruined the last hours of the day, but before the rain became too heavy we had seen e.g. two Slender-billed gulls (*Larus genei*) and two Audouin's Gulls (*Larus audouinii*). We also drove to the lighthouse of El Espigón where it was quite difficult to get good views to the sea due to the large boulders that block the waves. Night spent at Cartaya.



9.1. Wednesday: Andalucía, Marismas del Odiel – El Rocío

In the morning we went first to the beginning of El Espigón. Seawatching starting from 8:55 AM. Results of quite a quiet morning: three Balearic Shearwaters, flock of 11 Shelducks (*Tadorna tadorna*), a flock of 40 Audouin's Gulls and three Auks (*Alca torda*). We then went to watch the tidal zone but to our disappointment the tide was high and the water was rising very fast. Soon all mudflats were under water and the birds were flocked, but too far to observe (same place as 8.1.). Some numbers of waders: Dunlin 700, Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) 70, and Bar-tailed Godwit 42. Close to the parking place we flushed to Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*). In the pools of Marismas del Odiel were 400 Pintails (*Anas acuta*).

Next we went to Doñana where we checked El Acepuche and the flood area of El Rocío. Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Pochards (*Aythya ferina*) and Common Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*) dominated the pools but numbers were quite low. The most spectacular bird of the place was naturally the Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) which we saw two individuals. Also a beautiful light morph Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) soared above and a Griffon was seen. In the parking lot of the reception centre of El Acepuche there was tens of Azure-winged magpies. It was already quite late when we left to El Rocío to search for a place to stay for the night. We observed the lagoon of El Rocío from the roadside (A-483) at 18:00 – 18:40 PM and were virtually shocked by the amount of birds. Note that from this point only a part of the marshes can be observed. Some numbers: in total 210 Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*) passing over us to roost (biggest flock 110 birds), 270 Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*), 120 Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*), 430 Avocets (*Recurvirostra avocetta*) and 170 Black-tailed Godwits. The most numerous bird was the Coot (*Fulica atra*) with estimated 1500 individuals. Night at El Rocío.

10.1. Thursday: Andalucía El Rocío & La Rocina

We started the day by observing the El Rocío lagoon from the edge of the city. We were surprised to find a Red-knobbed Coot (*Fulica cristata*) swimming in front of us in a big Coot flock almost for the first thing in the morning. It gave excellent views both swimming and walking. Also a Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*) was surprising to see. We also

observed the marsh from the southern edge of the town where we saw also on Red-knobbed Coot though it could be same individual. The numbers of birds thus rose from the previous evening: 800 Flamingos, 125 Spoonbills, 700 Avocets, 180 Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) and 410 Black-Tailed Godwits.

We tried to enter the main marsh area but it was impossible without a four-wheel drive car. We saw Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*) and a flock of 58 Azure-winged Magpies from the roadside of A-483. Next we went to La Rocina where we spent the rest of afternoon where there was much more birds than at El Acepuche. The most surprising find was an adult/almost adult Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) though later we learned that in this area the species is found nowadays almost every winter. Other goodies were a Red-knobbed Coot, 28 Purple Gallinules and 2 Booted Eagles. At 16:20 PM we left Doñana and left towards Sevilla. This brief visit shows extremely well the potential of the place; a week or two could be easily spent here. Night at Dos Hermanos (a little south from Sevilla).



11.1. Friday: Andalucía, Laguna de la Zorilla – Laguna de Medina – Cádiz

Most of the morning was wasted for the search of the Laguna de la Zorilla (Espera Lagoons) as the advice how to get there was quite confusing. Before the lagoons we found another lake with 20 White-headed ducks (*Oxyura leucocephala*), 12 Red-crested Pochards (*Netta rufina*) and a Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*). The Red-legged partridges were very numerous in the hills: a total of 132 birds were counted. Finally we got found Espera Lagoons at 11:30 AM – only to see that they were quite empty with the Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) being the most numerous with 115 individuals. Anyway, we saw 11 White-headed ducks, a female Red-crested Pochard, 4 Red-knobbed Coots and two 2cy Bonelli's Eagles.



Next we went to Laguna de Medina: 140 White-headed Ducks, 450 Coots, 8 Red-crested Pochards and a Booted Eagle. Next we went to Cádiz where we observed the estuary area at Salina Tres Amigos, south from the town of Cádiz. 29 Audouin's Gulls and 545 Avocets are worth to mention. Lastly we seawatched from 17:20-18:00 PM and saw 3 Balearic Shearwaters, two Great Skuas (*Stercorarius skua*), 6 Arctic Skuas, Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) and a Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) which is rare in winter. Night at some roadside motel between Cádiz and Tarifa.

12.1. Saturday: Andalucía, Playa de Los Lances – Tarifa – Gibraltar

We started the day with seawatching from 8:10 to 9:15 AM at Playa de Los Lances (Tarifa Beach), but strong easterly winds (8-10m/s) made it very quiet. Only six distant (Balearic) Shearwaters and some Gannets were seen at the sea. At the beach there was 10 Audouin's Gulls, 95 Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*) and 12 Kentish Plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*). So we went on towards Gibraltar. Between Tarifa and Algeciras we counted about 150 Griffon Vultures. Also Cattle Egrets were more numerous than before.

We entered Gibraltar at 11:50 AM and spent the rest of the day there. What a remarkable rock it is! Most of the time we spent walking on the Upper Rock looking for the Rock Partridge (*Alectoris barbara*) but from 15:50 to 16:50 we seawatched at Europa Point. Seawatching produced 70 Balearic Shearwaters, a Great Skua and 3 Shags (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*). Finally, following the advice of local birdwatchers (many thanks!) we managed to see one Rock Partridge at Jacob's Ladder. Also one Peregrine Falcon was seen at "The Rock".

We left Gibraltar at dusk and spent the night at one roadside motel 4 kilometres east from Estepona.



13.1. Sunday: Andalucía, Serrania de Ronda and Sierra Bermeja

All day was spent driving the mountain roads and stopping whenever places looked interesting. Most of the day's drive can be seen on the map in Garcia & Paterson, page 194. We came to Ronda by road A-376, came back a little and drove via Júzcar, Atajate and Gaucín back to Estepona. We saw many new trip species, mostly woodland species, such as Nuthatches (*Sitta europaea*), Coal Tit (*Parus ater*) and Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*). The overall bird diversity was quite low, but this was to be expected, as the goal was to see mountain species. With them we also were successful. During the day we saw for example 8 Black Wheatears, 6 Cirl Buntings (*Emberiza cirlus*), a pair of Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and a Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*). Rock Buntings (*Emberiza cia*), Blue Rock Thrushes (*Monticola solitarius*) and Griffon Vultures were also easy to

The daily sums of all bird species are [here](#).

Literature

-García, E. and Paterson, A. 2001: Where to watch birds in Southern & Western Spain. Andalucía, Extremadura and Gibraltar. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm Ltd, London.

see, of the latter species we saw 55 individuals at Sierra Cristellina.

The last night was spent in the same hostel as the night before.

14.1. Monday: Andalucía, Estepona - Malaga

In the morning we went to the first free beach which was Playa el Padron and seawatched there 8:20 – 9.15. The sea was quiet with some Gannets, all heading west, but on the coast there was a lot of movement. Cattle Egrets were coming from roost sites in big flocks: the total was 732 individuals! Also Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) were moving in big flocks: about 5000 in a short time. After the beach we headed towards Malaga, but instead of the coast road we took the road that goes via Ojen and Monda. This road produced 2 Bonelli's Eagles, a Blue Rock Thrush etc. The midday was spent some 10 kilometres north from Malaga, where we saw a House Martin (*Delichon urbica*), three Booted Eagles and one Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*). Finally, we spent the last hours of our trip at Playa Campo de la Golf, Malaga. There we saw 11 distant (Balearic) Shearwaters, 4 Mediterranean Gulls, two Auks and one Booted Eagle. In the eucalyptus trees of the golf course there was at least 10 Monk Parakeets, also several large nests were built in the same trees.

At the parking place of the airport we saw another 5 Parakeets (unidentified) flying by and a flock of 320 Cattle Egrets flying some kilometres away.

So the intensive 10-day-birding trip to SW Spain was over. In this time we managed to see most of the species we wanted to see and of course many stunning landscapes and masses of wintering 'common' birds. Actually only the Marbled Teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*) was the only speciality that we did not see. In two weeks there would have been more time to spend e.g. in La Serena or Doñana.