



Busy scene at the entrance to one of the marquees



The official Extremadura at Fio

FAM TRIP FIO 2008

**Extremadura
Feb/Mar 2008**

Mad Dogs and Birders go out in the Mid-day Sun

By Robert Batty, Editor of Feathered World

Not quite what Noel Coward sang about but his lyrics came to mind when strolling through a village which was deserted with virtually all the inhabitants taking their mid-day siesta.

The intrepid party of birders had no time for this Spanish custom, many having travelled from Northern Europe, and were keen not to waste daylight hours, with so many different species of birds to be spotted and logged.

The party numbered some 40 or so delegates from a dozen or more countries all eager to observe the birds of this delightful region of Spain.

A four-hour coach journey south from Madrid airport took us to the most southerly point of our trip, and an overnight stay at a four-star parador in the attractive town of Mérida, the regional capital. At the crack of dawn a stroll down to the Guadiana River to watch the early departure of egrets, herons and cormorants leaving their roosts was a most impressive sight. Following breakfast, a half-hour drive took us to the Canchales Reservoir, a favourite haunt for birders. The early morning mist soon lifted and gave us some excellent sightings of water-birds, including waders and herons. A flurry of swallows ducking and diving under a low bridge, left me wondering if they had just stopped off on their migrating journey to the UK; perhaps they knew that the English spring was going to be late again this year.



Part of the Roman ruins at Caparra which have been carefully preserved

One of the beauties of birding in Extremadura is the varying landscape, from the wetlands and marshes to the rugged cliffs, which is where we were heading. There is usually at least one keen birder on every trip who keeps account of the sightings of the various species - Spanish sparrows, spotted cuckoos, magpies and black kite were duly noted by Barry Trevis who has kindly supplied a detailed list printed on pages 3 and 4 of this supplement.

Whilst many of the birders had a keen eye, nothing could compare to the expertise of the local guides attached to our party, Martin and Gottfried. Their observations and vast knowledge added immensely to the success of the tour.

However, the main purpose of this Press Trip was to visit the 3rd Extremadura Bird Watching Fair, FIO 2008 and to sample many of the diverse attractions for the dedicated bird watcher.

Fio is an important venue for local business reps in the tourism sector with meetings and workshops arranged for hoteliers, tourist guides and tour agents.

For the third year running the bird-watching fraternity descended on this tiny village, just one main street, and transforms it into a two-day exhibition. Two large marquees full of trade stands and reps from other birding areas such as Navarra, in the Pyrenees, extoll the many diverse attractions. In a fiesta-like atmosphere the wine of the region flows freely and local delicacies are on offer, especially the renowned ham and cheese - Spanish hospitality at its best. Old friends meet and new acquaintances are made. What the resident population think about this annual invasion is not known, but if nothing else it has put this remote little village on the bird-watching map.

Monfragüe National Park covers a wide area and the Salto del Gitano is well worth a visit to view the Griffon colony. A layby gave us an ideal spot to watch the Vultures on a high peak across the valley, spreading their wings to dry out in the sun, once the morning mist

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Two of the main marquees for trade stands

had lifted. We were especially fortunate to spot a sitting Griffon in a cleft on a rocky face, just a few metres from our vantage point on our side of the valley. Well camouflaged, but looking serene in close-up through a telescope lens - a rare opportunity to appreciate the beautiful feathers which fluttered in the gentle breeze. Also spotted, black storks, red kites, short-tailed eagle and a solitary Egyptian vulture.

The Fair is the biggest event of the year, situated on a hillside surrounded by wooded hills. Nearby what appears to be scrub land was, in fact, terraces of Eucalyptus trees now replaced by local trees such as Spanish Oak, a long process but preferred for the production of cork.

If only to demonstrate the diversity of birding in Extremadura, a visit to the reservoir of Ahigal and a chance to see the water birds, but early morning mist restricted sightings - plenty of water but few birds.

On to Gabriel y Galán, a large breeding area for numerous water birds such as warblers and terns. Unfortunately, after a leisurely stroll in a wooded area on the edge of the lake, all that was spotted was a solitary avocet, a species we were told, which originated in Scotland.

For something rather different, a visit to the Roman ruins at Cáparra. A picnic lunch was followed by a guided tour of this well-kept ancient site.

The ever-changing scenery provided some stunning vistas including a remote cherry orchard where the local inhabitants hold a Cherry Festival, the biggest event of the year for them.

Extremadura - a region of contrast and variety where much work has taken place to encourage visitors, and birders in particular. Modern highways, sparse traffic and excellent accommodation; the hotels we stayed at are highly recommended:

- Hospederia Monfragüe 3***
- Parador de Mérida 4****
- Hotel Spa Aguas de Serrejón 4****



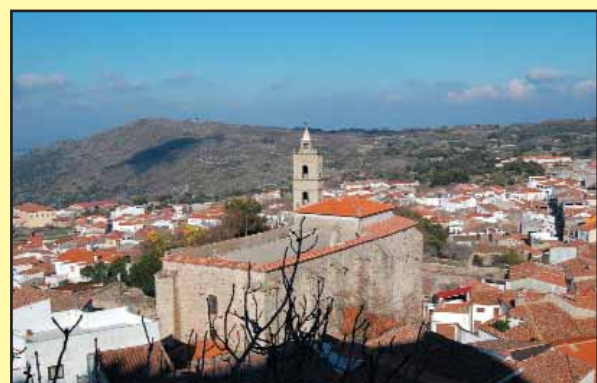
A view of the vast Reservoir of Ahidal, a good sight for water birds and other species



A roadside stop overlooking a Gorge near the famous Griffon colony



The gorge widens out showing the expanse of the river and the wooded slopes



Looking down from the castle of Montanchez with excellent views over the town and the surrounding hills

Left: A notice board which proves a helpful guide for the less experienced birders

Fam Trip – Extremadura

Birdwatching Fair (FIO) 2008 Spain 27 February – 2 March 2008

**** Depicts Extremadura speciality/sought-after species**

En-route Madrid (Barajas) Aeropuerto to Merida - afternoon of 27 Feb

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Starling | 8. Jackdaw |
| 2. Kestrel | 9. Little Egret |
| 3. Black Kite | 10. Moorhen |
| 4. White Stork | 11. Magpie |
| 5. Mallard | 12. Woodpigeon |
| 6. Collared Dove | 13. Red-legged Partridge |
| 7. Sand Martin | |



Birders wait for the early mornng mist to lift at Canchales Reservoir

Roman Bridge, Merida - early morning 28 Feb

14. House Sparrow
15. Coal Tit
16. Blackbird
17. Feral Pigeon
18. Kingfisher
19. Cettiis Warbler
20. Lesser Black-backed Gull
21. Cormorant
22. Song Thrush
23. Crested Lark
24. Little Bittern
25. Purple Gallinule **
26. Swift
27. Cattle Egret
28. Zitting Cisticola
29. Coot
30. Barn Swallow
31. Chiffchaff
32. Blackcap
33. Goldfinch
34. Greenfinch
35. Sparrowhawk
36. Corn Bunting



Canchales is a shallow lake excellent for spotting ducks, waders and herons

Canchales Reservoir - morning 28 Feb

37. Spanish Sparrow
38. Serin
39. White Wagtail
40. Sardinian Warbler
41. Marsh Harrier
42. Great-Spotted Cuckoo
43. Buzzard
44. Great Crested Grebe
45. Gadwall
46. Common Snipe
47. Hen Harrier
48. Merlin
49. Black-shouldered Kite **
50. Shoveler
51. Common Sandpiper
52. Little Bustard **
53. Calandra lark
54. Grey Heron
55. Great White Egret
56. Spoonbill
57. Great Bustard **
58. Teal
59. Lapwing
60. Common Crane **
61. Black-winged Stilt
62. Hoopoe
63. Blue Tit
64. Green Sandpiper

65. Meadow Pipit
66. Red Kite
67. Short-toed Eagle
68. Linnet
69. Raven
70. House Martin
71. Wigeon
72. Pintail
73. Skylark
74. Mistle Thrush
75. Stonechat

En-route

76. Southern Grey Shrike *



A helpful display board with a few of the birds located at Canchales Reservoir

Montanchez - afternoon 28 Feb

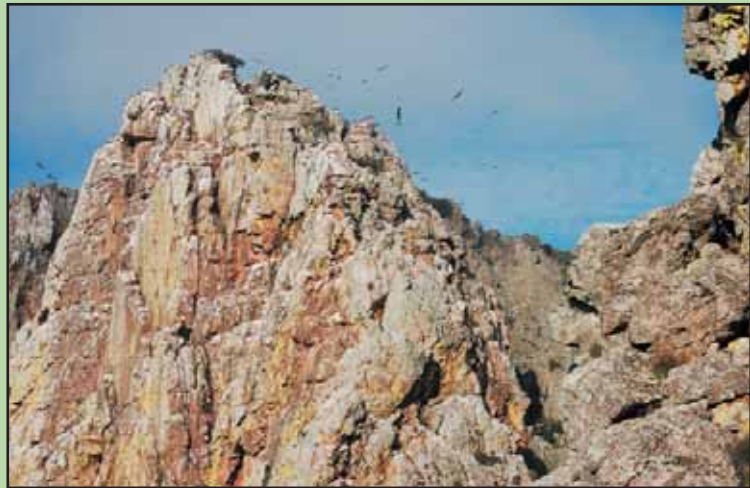
77. Blue Rock Thrush **
78. Alpine Accentor **
79. Lesser Kestrel
80. Black Redstart
81. Black Wheatear **
82. Crag Martin
83. Bonelliis Eagle **
84. Spotless Starling



Montanchez castle giving scenic views over the Extremadura countryside

Pena Falcon/Salto del Gitano (and near vicinity), Monfrague National Park - morning 29 Feb

- 85. Great Tit
- 86. Chaffinch
- 87. Griffon Vulture
- 88. Robin
- 89. Rock Bunting
- 90. Short-toed Treecreeper
- 91. Chough
- 92. Firecrest
- 93. Black Stork **
- 94. Black Vulture **
- 95. Red-rumped Swallow
- 96. Egyptian Vulture
- 97. Hawfinch
- 98. Peregrine
- 99. Booted Eagle



Portilla del Tietar, Monfrague National Park- afternoon 29 Feb

- 100. Spanish Imperial Eagle **
- 101. Eagle Owl **
- 102. Azure-winged Magpie **
- 103. Long-tailed Tit



Hotel Aguas de Serrajon - early morning 1 March

- 104. Woodlark

Alagon Valley (lakes) - morning 1 March

- 105. Black-headed Gull
- 106. Reed Bunting
- 107. Grey-lag Goose
- 108. Osprey
- 109. Dartford Warbler
- 110. Thekla Lark **
- 111. Goldcrest
- 112. Greenshank

Cabeza Bellosa - afternoon 1 March

- 113. Golden Eagle

Salto Caozo - evening 1 March

- 114. Grey Wagtail
- 115. Wren
- 116. Great-spotted Woodpecker

Arrocampo Reservoir, Saucedillo - morning 2 March

- 117. Little Grebe
- 118. Penduline Tit



Above: The well-known Griffon Vulture colony in Monfrague National Park, and below, birders take in the spectacular scenery at one of the vantage points



Left: The magnificent alter inside the church in the castle courtyard at Montanechez

Thanks to Barry Trevis of Ramblers Worldwide Holidays who logged the list of birds. Also to Martin and Gottfried, our guides, and Vicky and Christina who kept things running smoothly