



## Birds and Birding Solutions in Northeast Spain and Beyond

After collaborating on a successful Catalonia Bird Tour this spring Ornitholidays have launched several new tours for 2012 in cooperation with Birding In Spain. These are Southern Catalonia, Extremadura and Doñana, and the Western Pyrenees.

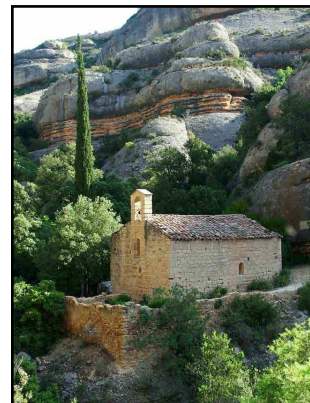


The lovely *dehesa* of Extremadura in the spring

**The Extremadura and Doñana tour** follows a well-known formula guaranteed to encounter a great number and variety of exciting birds in some of the most harmonious landscapes of Western Europe. Extremadura is the home of plains species such as Great and Little Bustards, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Montagu's Harrier, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Here too is the unique **Monfrague National Park** with 5 species of eagle possible in one morning! Spanish Imperial Eagle, Black Stork, Eagle Owl, Black Vulture, Azure-winged Magpie and Black-winged Kites are among the great birds awaiting participants on this tour.

**Coto Doñana** rarely needs much presentation, its fame as the best wetland reserve in the Western Mediterranean precedes it. Here we can see Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, Purple Gallinule, Collared Pratincole, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron and a whole lot more.

**Southern Catalonia** is scheduled to take place in June and has quite a different approach: walking, discovering nature and absorbing a little culture (and some wine too!). That's why it features as one of Ornitholidays **Quest for Nature Tours**, a filial company that seeks to take in as much nature as presents itself! Which of course doesn't mean that we will be ignoring the birds: we expect to encounter all the typical Mediterranean specialities plus the wetland birds of the Ebro delta. But also butterflies, flowers, amphibians, secluded spots for a cooling dip in mountain rivers...Nobody else offers a trip quite like this one.





**The Western Pyrenees** Most travelled birders know that the Spanish Pyrenees are home to specialities such as Wallcreeper, Lammergeier, Alpine Accentor, Citril Finch and Black Woodpecker. And some of the most magnificent scenery too. But what about the birds of the Ebro Valley and inland wetlands of Navarra, which just happen to be en-route to our destination in the Pyrenees? This variation should add Great Bittern, Bearded Tit, Red-crested Pochard, Black-bellied Sandgrouse and even the chance of encountering a Middle Spotted Woodpecker on day 1!

## Bonelli's Eagles nest successfully!



Birders and photographers who have stayed at **Montsonís** know that they can enjoy great views of **Bonelli's Eagles** just outside the village itself. What they surely don't know is that the resident pair of Bonelli's Eagles here had not bred successfully since 2005.

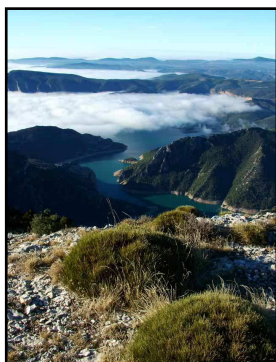


This was mainly due to disturbance from celebrations near the nest and perhaps food shortage in the breeding season.

Montsonís © Roy Mangersnes

We decided that after having taken so much from the eagles that we had to try and **give something back**, and that in part we were morally responsible to do something to try and reverse this worrying trend. We established a **supplementary feeding programme** using feral pigeons trapped from buildings where they were a nuisance. We also wrote and **delivered a letter to local entities** and leisure or tourism agents asking them for their help in controlling and impeding noisy celebrations and disturbance in the vicinity of the eagles' nest. The Bonelli's Eagles responded generously by successfully raising a **healthy chick**. The first one to leave that particular nest since 2005!

# Catalonia bird tour news



Judging by the feedback the first **Ornitholidays Catalonia** tour was a great success. It's rather difficult to pinpoint the highlights of this bird-packed tour, but we'll try! Some of the participants chose Citril Finch as their favourites, others went for the Lammergeiers, although the majority vote was for the Eagle Owls with their chicks. Red-throated Pipit, Pied Crow, Lesser Kestrel, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, and Collared Pratincole also raised a few smiles of appreciation.

*Some of this year's Ornitholiday's Catalonia tour participants having their picnic while watching birds in a hide in the Ebro delta.*



Here's a link to the trip report:

<http://www.ornitholidays.co.uk/tourreports/Spain%20-%20Catalonia%202011.pdf>

We'll be making minor tweaks to next year's Catalonia tour, and the prospect for 2012 is even more promising.

Ask Nigel or Sandy at **Ornitholidays** for more details.

## Birders like you

Sometimes people come to this part of Spain on business, on holiday, to be with family, to go to a wedding, or to enjoy the opera....And what happens if they're **avid birders**? Isn't it right for them to want to dedicate a couple of days to seeing the best birds the region has to offer? And to stay at a friendly, comfortable hotel away from the hordes of tourists? Of course! And here are some of them who have done just that.

**Garry and Wendy Philpott**



*Without Steve's knowledge of where to find the birds and his identification skills - both visual and aural - we would have missed many of the key species.*

*We had not expected to be looking at a pair of Eagle Owls ten minutes after Steve picked us up on day one! Having started on such a high note, things could easily have gone steadily*



downhill thereafter. Happily they didn't. Among the other highlights during the first two days around Lleida were the seven species of lark (particularly the surprisingly close views of Dupont's), the groups of Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, the many different species of warbler, the frequent sightings of Stone Curlew, the Great Spotted Cuckoo and, of course, the prolonged close-up views of Golden Eagle.

In the Pyrenees it was great to see Lammergeier and the other vultures and raptors. We also enjoyed the very close views of Alpine Accentor, Citril Finch, Alpine Chough, Ring Ouzel, Firecrest - and many more.



Our tour far exceeded our expectations and we are already looking forward to seeing Steve next February for some winter birding!"

Garry and Wendy came in April and birded the **plains of Lleida**, the **Belchite steppes** and the **Pyrenees of Navarra**. They stayed at *la Garbinada* (Lleida), the *Rincón del Cierzo* (Belchite) and *Metsola apartments* (Isaba, Navarra).

#### Ian and Marjorie West



A fantastic first experience of birding in Spain with great sightings of birds of prey Golden Eagle, Eagle Owl, Bonelli's Eagle, and of course the Lammergeier to name just a few. ....Had a quality 3 day list that was packed with a good number of firsts due to top quality guiding. The accommodation was excellent with good meals, cosy en suite bedroom and friendly staff at a reasonable price. An enjoyable 3 days.

Ian and Marjorie came in March, and stayed at *Montsonís* for 4 nights. They birded the Lleida plains, Montsec and the Pre-Pyrenees.

#### Ian and Sheila Appleton



We have just returned from Aragon and had Steve guide us for two days, one day on the plains around Balaguer... and the second higher in the Pyrenees north of Ainsa. We are novice birders and had exceptional times both days and saw / heard a lot of birds as well as marmot, chamois and red squirrel. We have used a number of guides in Spain but we found Steve exceptional and good company as well, we have no hesitation recommending him whatsoever and am sure we will use him again.



Ian And Sheila spent their summer holidays in northeast Spain combining birds, culture and taking it easy! They stayed at *Hosteria de Guara* for one week.

# Bird news from Catalonia

The last of the 3 **Black-winged Kites** that spent much of the winter on the drylands of Alfés to the south of Lleida was last seen in the area in early March.



The **Eagle Owl** pair to the south of Lleida that Garry and Wendy Philpott referred to raised 3 chicks, which were thoroughly enjoyed by our guests in April. On a later visit in May the birds could not be found, and are likely to have dispersed to adjacent areas.

2 **Eleonora's Falcons** were observed on passage through the Lleida drylands in late June, and spent some time pursuing the local nesting Hobbies. Luckily they didn't catch them! Eleonora's Falcons are often seen in early summer in ones or twos on the drylands of Lleida. One bird was reported by Alan Bale at Montclar on 21<sup>st</sup> July catching a bat!

The first **Red-footed Falcons** of the spring were reported from Balaguer on the 11<sup>th</sup> May. The count rose from 3 on the 11<sup>th</sup> to a maximum of 15 in the same area two days later. The last individuals were seen around Balaguer on 28<sup>th</sup> May, while the latest spring record in general was of a second calendar year male (photo) which stayed on the Bellmunt drylands until mid-June. This species is a regular visitor in varying numbers on the Lleida drylands in May.



This young male Red-footed Falcon spent much of his time pouncing on grasshoppers from a perch in an almond tree.



Displaying male **Little Bustards** were displaying on the drylands of Lleida from around the 20<sup>th</sup> April to early June. **Large wintering flocks** of Little bustards, consisting of several hundred birds were regularly observed in the area between Lleida and Tàrraga in the November-February period.

**Red-rumped Swallows** continue the process that is taking them to colonize parts of the southern half of the province of Lleida. Two birds were observed near Àger with an Ornitholidays group in early April, and others have been observed in Montsec at Os de Balaguer and Alòs de Balaguer, and in the vicinity of the River Ebro at Bovera, Ascó, Flix and other locations.

**Long-billed Dowitcher.** On 14<sup>th</sup> April, the penultimate day of the Ornitholiday's Catalonia tour participants were fortunate to spot a Long-billed Dowitcher in the Ebro delta. This is a rarity in Spain, and in all likelihood this particular bird had arrived the previous autumn, had been lost from view until rediscovered by us. On the same day the lucky tour participants were also treated to no fewer than 7 Red-throated Pipits.

# New! Birding In Spain Video Channel on You Tube

The screenshot shows the YouTube channel page for 'Birding In Spain'. The channel name is 'Birding In Spain' with the subtitle 'Canal de BirdingInSpain'. The page features a main video player showing a Hoopoe on a tree branch. Below the video, the title 'Birding In Spain - The Hoopoe Tree' is displayed, along with the upload date '25/07/2011' and view count 'Visto 45 veces'. The description mentions 'Hoopoe, Upupa epops, landing and perched in a tree in front of the Hoopoe hide near Lleida, Catalonia, Spain. Also featuring a Thekla Lark.' To the right of the main video, there is a list of other videos from the channel, including 'Birding In Spain - Black Vultures in the', 'Birding In Spain - Cirl Buntings at drinking', 'Birding In Spain - Stone Curlews', 'Birding In Spain - Griffon Vultures', 'Birding In Spain - Montagu's Harrier', 'Birding In Spain - Lammerqueiers in', and 'Birding In Spain - Lammerqueiers in'. The page also includes a search bar, navigation tabs like 'Todos', 'Videos subidos', and 'Favoritos', and a sidebar with 'Suscriptores (5)'.

**Birding In Spain**  
Canal de BirdingInSpain

**Birding In Spain - The Hoopoe Tree**  
de BirdingInSpain | 25/07/2011 | Visto 45 veces  
Hoopoe, Upupa epops, landing and perched in a tree in front of the Hoopoe hide near Lleida, Catalonia, Spain. Also featuring a Thekla Lark.

**Birding In Spain - Black Vultures in the**  
14 reproducciones - hace 2 semanas

**Birding In Spain - Cirl Buntings at drinking**  
19 reproducciones - hace 2 semanas

**Birding In Spain - Stone Curlews**  
15 reproducciones - hace 2 semanas

**Birding In Spain - Griffon Vultures**  
14 reproducciones - hace 2 semanas

**Birding In Spain - Montagu's Harrier**  
175 reproducciones - hace 2 semanas

**Birding In Spain - Lammerqueiers in**  
92 reproducciones - hace 2 semanas

**Birding In Spain - Lammerqueiers in**

**Suscriptores (5)**

BirdingInSpain now has its own video channel on You Tube. Currently it features some 20 videos, with some of the following action....



- Ever seen a male Montagu's Harrier sailing low over a field of barley? Ever got close enough to see what he had just been eating?
- Little Owl - all revealed! What the Little Owls were getting up to behind the hummock!
- Rock Sparrow - This Rock Sparrow came down for a drink, and so did this one. Or are they the same birds?
- What is the Bee-eater trying to prove by bashing its bill against the branch in that way?
- What frightened the Thekla Lark out of the tree?

What can you do? Well - watch, share, subscribe, and compare notes with your own videos!

More Birding In Spain videos are on their way. If you subscribe to our channel you'll be automatically notified of any updates.

## Bird Fair auction

This year BirdingInSpain will contribute the following to the **British Birdfair auction**:

- One **free day's guiding and accommodation** for two between November 2011 and April 2012.
- Spain pack - Our 2 books ("Where the birds are in northeast Spain" and "Flying over the pyrenees, standing on the plains"), printed itineraries with suggestions for accommodation, printed routes, a BirdingInSpain t-shirt (photos)
- One **free day** of photography in one of our **plains hides**
- One **free day** of photography in the pool or **eagle hide**
- 2 BirdingInSpain T-shirts

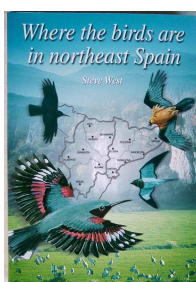
We'll be there in our BirdingInSpain t-shirts. If you see us, say hello!

# Winter tours

April and May are by far the most popular months for a birding trip to northeast Spain, but gradually more and more birders are becoming aware of the advantages of planning a winter trip to the region:

- **High mountain species** like Wallcreeper, Alpine Accentor, Snowfinch and Citril Finch become more accessible
- **Plains species** like Great Bustard, Little Bustard, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse form large flocks
- Young Bonelli's and Golden Eagles disperse over large areas, making them easier to observe
- Interesting **resident species** stay around: Lammergeier, Black Vulture, Eagle Owl, Black Wheatear, Black Woodpecker, Dupont's Lark, Black-winged Kite ...
- **Large flocks** of Cranes gather at Gallocanta
- Enjoy some **winter sunshine**

So when planning your next long weekend **between November and February**, think about birding in northeast Spain.



*Where the birds are in northeast Spain* is the ideal travel companion for any birder planning a trip to the region.

We are out of stock, but it can still be purchased from **Subbuteo Natural History books**.



# Seawatching excursions

In the last two years we have helped organize **seawatching excursions** from a vessel on the **Catalan coast**. On different 3-4 hour excursions in April, May and June we have encountered the following species:

Storm Petrel · Pomarine Skua · Arctic Skua · Great Skua · Balearic Shearwater · Mediterranean Shearwater · Cory's Shearwater · Sooty Shearwater · Gannet · Audouin's Gull · Mediterranean Gull · Gull-billed Tern · Sandwich Tern · Common Tern · Little Tern · Black Tern · Whiskered Tern

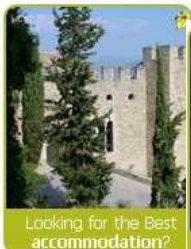


Next year we will be programming at least one such excursion. Ask us for more details if you think you can join us.

# Spotlight on the best accommodation for birders

Choosing the right accommodation in a foreign land is often no easy task. Getting it wrong can make the difference between an enjoyable stay and a disastrous one. We know the region and the best places to stay, so why not take our advice?

The screenshot shows the BirdingInSpain website. The top navigation bar includes links for home, guiding, sites and itineraries, books, birding in Spain, birding phototrip, bird pictures, blog, free downloads, nh holidays, birding mallorca, about us, and links. The main content area features a large image of a bird and a sidebar with 'Sites and Itineraries' and 'The Ebro Delta' section. The 'The Ebro Delta' section includes a description of the Ebro Delta Natural Park, a list of species, and a section titled 'Do you need convincing? Then let the birds do the talking:'. A red circle highlights the 'Delta Hotel' under the heading 'Looking for the best accommodation', with a red arrow pointing to it from below. The website also features sections for 'The Ebro Delta Birding Experience' and 'The Ebro Delta Birding Itineraries'.



Looking for the Best accommodation?



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Looking for the Best accommodation?

**Rincón del Cierzo** - the hotel for Dupont's Lark

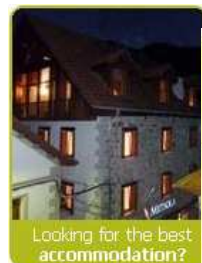
**Montsonís** - the hotel for Bonelli's Eagle

**La Garbinada** - the hotel for Eagle Owl and Black Wheatear

**Metsola** - the hotel for Alpine Accentor and Citril Finch

**Hotel Usón** - the hotel for summer Wallcreeper

**Hostería de Guara** - the hotel for winter Wallcreeper and Lammergeier



Looking for the best accommodation?



Looking for the Best accommodation?



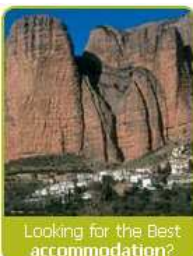
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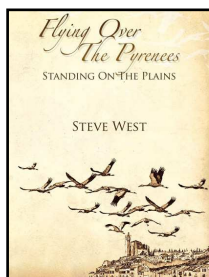
**Delta hotel** - The hotel for wetland species in the Ebro Delta

**Les Eres** - the hotel for winter Snowfinch

**Hospedería de Loarre** - The hotel for Black Woodpecker and Riglos

For any enquiries regarding the content of this newsletter or any aspect of birding in Spain contact Steve West.

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"Flying over the Pyrenees, standing on the plains" by Steve West. Read the rave reviews in the **books** section of the main website.



Steve West and **Birding In Spain** are on Facebook

