

Madrid

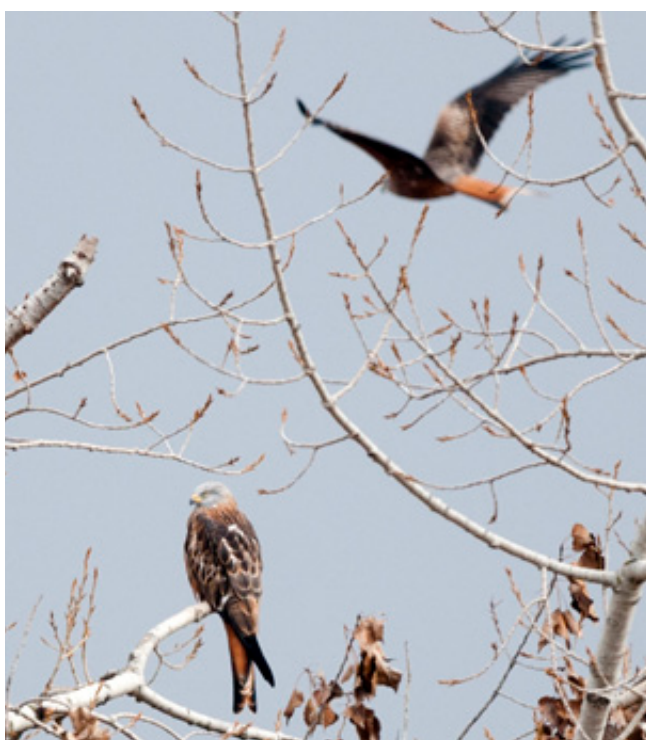
Birdwatching Trip Report | 16.-18.12.2013

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Common Buzzard near Fresno de Torote



Red Kites



El Pardo game reserve as seen from our first viewpoint

This report covers two days of birdwatching around Madrid, Spain. We visited El Pardo, the hills around Fresno de Torote and Embalse de Santillana by car.

16.12.2013

After a strenuous flight from Vienna via Zurich, we arrived in Madrid with one hour delay. Manolo Andrés, our friend and guide, picked us up at the airport and we directly drove out to Fresno de Torote in the last light of the day, with Spottless Starling (*Sturnus unicolor*) and Magpie (*Pica pica*) being the most common species seen from the car.

Northeast of Madrid, between the villages Daganze de Arriba and Fresno, lies an area of rolling hills, where heavily cultivated land is mixed with bushes and small, forested patches. We tried to find some of the classic Spanish target species, occurring in this area: Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*), Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) and Spanish Imperial Eagle (*Aquila adalberti*).

As we were really late, we didn't find anything exceptional on this very quick visit. Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) and Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) were common and among roosting Goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*) and Spanish Sparrows (*Passer hispanoliensis*) we found a nice Rock Sparrow (*Petronia petronia*). A few Red Kites (*Milvus milvus*) were seen flying to their roosts and two Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) were also recorded besides common wintering passerines, such as Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochrurus*), Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*) and Robin (*Erithacus rubicula*). In the darkness, we drove to our hotel in the crowded center of Madrid.

17.12.2013

Starting a little late, we headed to the village of El Pardo, a little northwest of Madrid, with its closed royal game reserve. We set up the scopes outside the reserve (40°30'22.02"N 3°46'12.24"W) and watched the scattered oaks, which host a roost for vultures and occasionally eagles. We immediately spotted at least 21 Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), 2 ad. and 2 juv./imm. Black Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*) and an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle which gave distant, yet wonderful views. Additionally, we recorded (selection) Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), one Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), thousands of Wood Pigeons (*Columba palumbus*) in virtually every tree, hundreds of Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*), single Great Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) and Monk Parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*) flying over, at least eight Azure-winged Magpies (*Cyanopica cyanus*), a male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*), a few calling European Green Woodpeckers (*Picus viridis sharpei*), Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*), Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*) and much more.

From another point a little further north (40°32'0.09"N 3°47'19.70"W), where we took a short walk along the river, we recorded an adult Bonelli's Eagle (*Aquila fasciata*) perched in a tree, one Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), an adult Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), four Crested Larks (*Galerida cristata*) and Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*). When the sun broke through the clouds for some minutes, vultures and eagles took off and gave nice views soaring out of sight.

In the afternoon, we continued across the picturesque landscape of Cuenca alta manzanares to Embalse de Santillana. We



Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Common Black-headed Gulls roosting at Embalse de Santillana.

were astonished to find thousands of Lesser Black-backed Gulls roosting on the lake (with one 3rd calendar-year sporting a white color-ring R:H7T), equally mixed with Common Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*). Waterfowl included Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*), Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), a male Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*), Gadwall (*Anas strepera*), a female Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*), Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and Coot (*Fulica atra*). White Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*) and eight Common Snipes (*Gallinago gallinago*) frequented the beach and Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*) was singing.

18.12.2013

Met Manolo outside Madrid and started to his bird ringing station at Reserva Municipal de Azuqueca de Henares in the morning (40°32'56.80"N 3°15'25.67"W). The site is closed to the public but access will be granted to preregistered groups. The four pools of the former water purification plant host a rich bird life thanks to various measures like nesting aids and plantings. We recorded a lot of passerines and some waterfowl, just to mention a few: Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*), Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and one Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*).

We continued to Fresno again, where we had a very successful afternoon session, with eleven species of raptors (2-3 Black Vultures, 1 juv./imm. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, 2-4 ad. Spanish Imperial Eagles, 1 Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Northern Goshawk, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Red Kite, 2 Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus*, 1 Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*, Common Kestrel and Common Buzzard), lots of Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*), around 35 Great Bustards (*Otis tarda*), another Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*), Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*), Calandra Larks (*Melanocorypha calandra*), Meadow Pipits (*Anthus pratensis*), European Stonechats (*Saxicola torquatus*) and Spanish Sparrows.

Late in the evening, we visited another spot further north, where an Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*) and several Redwings (*Turdus iliacus*) were calling.

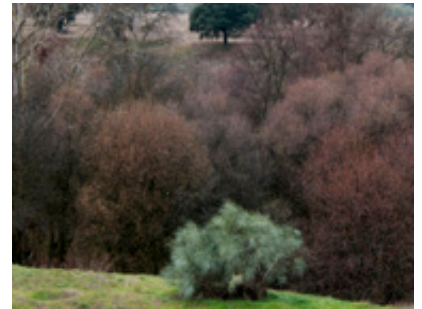


Tiny section of a flock of wintering Wood Pigeons near Reserva Municipal de Azuqueca de Henares

List of Species (79)

1. Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) - one ad. was at El Pardo on 17.12.
2. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
3. Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) - several were at Embalse de Santillana and XX on 17. and 18.12.
4. Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) - as above
5. Eurasian Teal (*Anas crecca*) - one ♀ was at E. d. Santillana on 18.12.
6. Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) - several were seen at XX on 18.12.
7. Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*) - seen around Fresno de Torote
8. Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) - around 20 were at E. d. Santillana
9. Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) - recorded at XX and E. d. Santillana
10. Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) - a few were at E. d. Santillana
11. Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) - single individuals were flying over El Pardo
12. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) - several seen at XX
13. White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) - seen twice at XX and around Fresno d. T.
14. Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) - more than 21 were at El Pardo and singles were seen flying at Cuenca alta manzanares
15. Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) - four were roosting at El Pardo and 2-3 were recorded near Fresno d. T. on 18.12.
16. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) - 1 juv./imm. was sitting in a field near Fresno d. T. on 18.12.
17. Spanish Imperial Eagle (*Aquila adalberti*) - 1-3 ad. were at El Pardo and 2-4 ad. around Fresno d. T.
18. Bonelli's Eagle (*Aquila fasciata*) - 1 ad. was sitting in a coniferous tree in El Pardo
19. Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*) - quite common, especially around Fresno d. T.
20. Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) - 1 ♂ and 1 juv./♀ was near Fresno d. T. on 18.12.
21. Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) - 1 juv./♀, as above
22. Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) - common
23. Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) - fairly common
24. Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) - singles were at El Pardo and Fresno d. T.
25. Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) - common
26. Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) - 1 juv./♀ was near Fresno d. T. on 18.12.
27. Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) - heard calling at XX on 18.12.
28. Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) - only seen at XX on 18.12.
29. Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*) - recorded at E. d. Santillana and XX
30. Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) - 3 different groups (ca. 35 ind.) were seen around Fresno d. T. on 18.12.
31. Eurasian Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) - seen repeatedly around Fresno d. T.
32. Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) - 8 were feeding on the shore of E. d. Santillana on 17.12.
33. Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) - singles were flying with Lesser Black-backed Gulls above El Pardo and thousands were roosting at E. d. Santillana
34. Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) - big flocks were passing El Pardo and Madrid. Thousands were roosting at E. d. Santillana
35. Common Pigeon (*Columba livia*)
36. Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*) - few were among Wood Pigeons near Fresno
37. Wood Pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) - extremely common everywhere
38. Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) - a small flock was seen at Fresno d. T.
39. Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*) - one was calling in the evening of 18.12. near XX
40. Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) - seen at El Pardo and XX
41. European Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis sharpei*) - heard at El Pardo, seen near Fresno d. T.
42. Greater Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)
43. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*) - seen twice, at El Pardo and Fresno d. T.
44. Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) - flocks were in the fields around Fresno d. T.
45. Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*) - four were recorded at El Pardo
46. Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*) - a big flock (ca. 50 ind.) was seen in fields around Fresno d. T.
47. Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) - many were heard in fields around Fresno d. T.
48. White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
49. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) - one was at XX on 18.12.
50. European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)
51. Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
52. European Stonechat (*Saxicola torquatus*) - a few were around Fresno d. T.
53. Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)
54. Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*) - 2-3 were heard calling in the evening of 18.12. near XX
55. Common Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)
56. Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*) - heard singing and seen at E. d. Santillana and XX
57. Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)
58. Eurasian Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) - heard at XX on 18.12.
59. Great Tit (*Parus major*)

- 60. Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)
- 61. Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)
- 62. Short-toed Treecreeper (*Certhia brachydactyla*) - heard at El Pardo and XX
- 63. Iberian Magpie (*Cyanopica cyanus*) - 8 were at El Pardo, feeding below oak trees
- 64. Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*) - very common
- 65. Western Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)
- 66. Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone corone*)
- 67. Northern Raven (*Corvus corax*) - 2-3 were on fields around Fresno d. T. on 18.12.
- 68. Spotless Starling (*Sturnus unicolor*) - very common
- 69. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
- 70. Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)
- 71. Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispanoliensis*) - recorded several times, bigger flocks of 100+ ind. were in the fields around Fresno d. T.
- 72. Common Rock Sparrow (*Petronia petronia*) - one was in a flock of Goldfinches near Fresno d. T. on 16.12.
- 73. Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)
- 74. Common Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*) - recorded around Fresno d. T.
- 75. European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)
- 76. European Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)
- 77. European Serin (*Serinus serinus*) - one was singing at the metro station of XX
- 78. Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*) - a flock of c. 50 ind. was at El Pardo on 17.12. and several were recorded around Fresno d. T.
- 79. Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*) - one flock was at El Pardo



Spanish Sparrow, Fresno de Torote

Acknowledgements

We want to express our deepest thanks to Manolo, Pedro, Alberto and Sarah who invited us on this memorable trip to Madrid. It was well worth to visit birdwatching sites off the beaten path and besides the famous birding hotspots around the country. We really enjoyed the birds and locations, the good infrastructure and cuisine and are ready to return! Check out Manolo's website <http://anillamiento.net> featuring photos of birds in the hand in various plumages!



M. Andrés, L. Khil and C. Roland at Embalse de Santillana