

Report Of A Birding Trip To

Madrid Province - Spain

March 6th - March 9th 2008

Participants:

Cor Hopman
Jan van der Laan



Spanish Imperial Eagle – *Aquila adalberti*

Embalse de San Juan, Madrid Province, Spain © Jan van der Laan 2008.

Introduction

From 6-9 March 2008, Cor Hopman and I, Jan van der Laan, visited the Madrid province in Spain. Our main goal was to find the Spanish Imperial Eagle – *Aquila adalberti* plus some Iberian specialities like Cinereous Vulture, Great Bustard, Bonelli's Eagle, Southern Grey Shrike or Thekla Lark.

Birds

In March a lot of summer visitors have not yet been returned from their winter quarters in Africa. Nice birds as Lesser Kestrel, Roller, Red-rumped Swallow amongst others will return a month later. However, our main target was the Spanish Imperial Eagle, these days a good species. I missed this species during my visit in 1983. At that time we knew only of one place, the Coto Doñana. During that 1983 visit – after returning from the Kabylie Nuthatch quest from Algeria - all tours were sold out and we could not find any eagle at the borders of the reserve. These days there are several well known places around Madrid and I found one on the internet, a place some 50 km west of Madrid along the M501. Other good places are more further into the Extramadura, like Monfragues.

Recommended Literature, Sites and Trip Reports

I used the Where to Watch Birds in Europe and Russia, which I left behind in the rental car unfortunately!

[birdwatchingmadrid.blogspot.com / 2006 / 10 / spanish-eagle-and-other-madrilean.html](http://birdwatchingmadrid.blogspot.com/2006/10/spanish-eagle-and-other-madrilean.html) is useful for Imperial Eagle, Great Bustard and others, but navigation on this site is a little bit difficult. However, this site gave us just enough information for the best area (10 reproductive pairs) for Spanish Imperial Eagle: the reserve (ZEPA called in Spanish) Encinares del Rio Cofio-Alberche, which is roughly west of the triangle Chapineria - Navas del Rey - Robledo de Chavela (M501 and M512).

Useful trip reports can be found at www.birdtours.co.uk.

Sound Recordings

There was a CD-player in the car and we had the whole series Die Vogelstimmen Europas, Nordafrikas und Vorderasiens by Andreas Schulze (2003) with us. These proved to be very useful to identify and lure Thekla Larks (no harm to any bird was done, however!).

The Species Accounts

The order and nomenclature of Birds of the World, A Checklist by James F. Clements (2007, 7th edition plus updates till November 2007) is followed.

Acknowledgments

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Alkmaar, March 2008

If you have any remarks, questions or suggestions, please contact:

Jan van der Laan
Brouwerstraat 19
1814 HX Alkmaar
The Netherlands

Telephone: ++31-72-5203091

Email: j.vdlaan@xs4all.nl

Itinerary

- 6 March** Departure from Amsterdam at 9:55 hours with flight VY 6521 (Vueling), arrival at Barajas Airport, Madrid at 12:20. Picked-up the rental car – Ford Focus - at Hertz. Passed through the centre of Madrid, saw the Bernabeu Stadium and the Prado Museum, before we finally arrived at the area near Navas del Rey – Robledo de Chavela. First birds were Rock Bunting, Griffon Vulture, Black Starling, Common Buzzard, Corn Bunting, Meadow Pipit, European Serin, Azure-winged Magpie, Barn Swallow, Raven, Black Kite (the only one), Black Redstart, Red-legged Partridge and Common Kestrel. We found the area a little bit disappointing, because there were few sites to park the car and even fewer sites where you had a good overview of the area. Nevertheless we decided to give it another try the next day. After sunset we went looking for our hotel in Las Rozas and after an hour long search we found out it was between Las Rozas and Las Matas along the A6. The hotel (Gran Hotel Almenar, Jaraiz s / n, Las Rozas de Madrid, 28290) was nice and clean. We had a good dinner and went to sleep, very tired.
- 7 March** After an early rise we went to Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey. Just before San Juan is a dirt road heading north. From there we found a good vista point. We had to wait for about ten minutes when a big bird of prey appeared. A closer look revealed it was a Spanish Imperial Eagle! Half an hour later another (or the same) appeared. So less than 24 hours and our mission was accomplished. Other birds here were Green Woodpecker, Sardinian Warbler, Crag Martin, Cinereous Vulture (at least one), Griffon Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle (two adult birds), Goshawk (one), Grey and White Wagtail, European Serin, Hoopoe, Crested Tit, Coal Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Spotless Starling, Azure-winged Magpie, Rock Bunting, Fialfare, Mistle Thrush, Great Spotted Woodpecker. In the afternoon we went to Robledo de Chavela to buy some food. After a short picnic near Fresnedillas de Olivas – which produced a Short-toed Eagle – we decided to drive to El Pardo, just north of Madrid. Just before Peralejo we discovered at least 4 Red Kites and while looking at these, we discovered a Cinereous Vulture, soaring above the road! We took several photographs and after the bird had disappeared we continued to El Pardo. Birds seen en route were Stonechat, Southern Grey Shrike, White Stork, Corn Bunting, Great Cormorant, Common Coot and Common Kestrel. At El Pardo we saw a two flocks of c 30 resting Griffon Vultures. Other birds were House Martin, Crested Tit, Hawfinch and Little Owl. We had dinner in a weird restaurant El Faro, where they put us as the only non-smoking guests in the Salón Náutico room. Later we went back to El Rozas to our hotel (we could find it this time without any effort!).
- 8 March** Again we went to the Embalse de San Juan west of Navas del Rey. After a 10 minutes wait we saw two adult Spanish Imperial Eagles calling to each other! Also two Cinereous Vultures soared overhead. Other birds were Sardinian and Dartford Warbler, Rock Bunting, European Serin, Crested Tit, Firecrest, Green Woodpecker (not seen, only calling) and lots of Griffon Vultures. After buying some food again in Robledo de Chavela, we had lunch at a spot between Robledo de Chavela and Fresnedillas de Olivas. The first day we had seen crested larks there, now it was time to give them a closer look. Identification on plumages features alone was difficult, so we did some play-back test: we played Thekla Lark and Crested Lark and the birds reacted only to Thekla Larks! Other birds there were Stonechat, Southern Grey Shrike (one), Corn Bunting and Sparrow Hawk. Next on the program were the bustards and to get there we had to drive to an area northeast of Madrid, in the triangle Valdetorres de Jarama, Fuente el Saz de Jarama and El Casar. Birding here proved to be very good, we managed to find three groups of Great Bustards, with three, fourteen and c 30 birds. Also here was one only male Little Bustard - seen only from the car - Hen Harrier, Red-legged Partridge, Stone Curlew, Green Sandpiper, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Common Kestrel and Black Redstart. After sunset we went back to Madrid, where we looked for three hours around the airport for the hotel High Tech Aeropuerto (C/ Galeón 25, 28042 Madrid). Finally we delivered back the car, phoned the hotel and asked if they could pick us up. This hotel was alongside a parallel road, which was only to be reached by a strange secret route, still unknown to us. At 23:45 we went to sleep, too tired to eat or to take a drink.
- 9 March** We woke up at 4:45 hours. The shower produced only cold water. At 5.30 we left the hotel, took a taxi (and were charged 23 €), checked in and had some breakfast at the airport. The plane was leaving in time (6:45 VY 6506). We arrived at 9:10 hours and were picked up by Marieke (my girlfriend) and Bob (my son).



Cinereous Vulture - *Aegypius monachus* south of Pajares.
7 March 2008 © Jan van der Laan 2008.



Thekla Lark - *Galerida theklae*, near Fresnedillas, Spain.
8 March 2008 © Cor Hopman 2008.



Great Bustard - *Otis tarda*, east of Talamanca de Jarama.
8 March 2008 © Cor Hopman 2008.

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01. **Great Cormorant / Aalscholver** – *Phalacrocorax carbo*
7 March c 10 Embalse de Valmayor, along the M505 between El Escorial and Galapagar.
8 March c 5 Embalse de Valmayor, along the M505 between El Escorial and Galapagar.
02. **Grey Heron / Blauwe Reiger** – *Ardea cinerea*
7 March 2 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
8 March 1 Valdetorres de Jarama (along road 103).
03. **Cattle Egret / Koereiger** – *Bubulcus ibis*
8 March 5 south of El Casar.
 c 20 east of Talamanca de Jarama.
04. **White Stork / Ooievaar**– *Ciconia ciconia*
Rather common, seen daily with 10-20 birds; several were already nesting or breeding.
05. **Mallard / Wilde Eend** – *Anas platyrhynchos*
Quite common, seen daily with c 10 birds.
06. **Red Kite / Rode Wouw** – *Milvus milvus*
7 March 3-4 between Fresnedillas and Pajares, along road 510.
8 March 3 (same as 7 March) between Fresnedillas and Pajares, along road 510.
07. **Black Kite / Zwarte Wouw** – *Milvus migrans*
6 March 1 along the M40 west of Madrid.
08. **Cinereous Vulture / Monniksgier** – *Aegypius monachus*
7 March 1 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
 1 between Fresnedillas and Pajares, along road 510.
8 March 2 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
When seeing from a distance with the sun behind the birds, identification was quite tricky. Best markers from a distance then where the light-coloured legs.
09. **Eurasian Griffon / Vale Gier** – *Gyps fulvus*
Seen daily with c 100 birds each day. At El Pardo we saw two flocks of c 30 birds resting in the trees.
10. **Short-toed Eagle / Slangenarend** – *Circaetus gallicus*
7 March 1 (seen twice) between Robledo de Chavela and Fresnedillas.
11. **Northern Harrier / Blauwe Kiekendief** – *Circus cyaneus*
8 March c 10 In the triangle Talamanca de Jarama, Fuente el Saz de Jarama and El Casar.
12. **Eurasian Sparrowhawk / Sperwer** – *Accipiter nisus*
We saw one on 7 or 8 March, but we did not take notes where exactly and when, sorry!
13. **Northern Goshawk / Havik** – *Accipiter gentilis*
7 March 1 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
14. **Eurasian or Common Buzzard / Buizerd** – *Buteo buteo*
Quite common, seen daily with c 10 birds.
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15. **SPANISH IMPERIAL EAGLE / SPAANSE KEIZERAREND** - *AQUILA ADALBERTI*
 7 March 2 (1 bird seen twice) adult seen soaring in a valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
 8 March 2 adults seen and calling to each other (a low wuk-wuk), valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey. Highlight of the holiday!
16. **Bonelli's Eagle / Havikarend** - *Aquila fasciata*
 7 March 2 adults soaring in a valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
17. **Eurasian Kestrel / Torenavalk** - *Falco tinnunculus*
 Scarce, seen daily with only 1-3 birds.
18. **Red-legged Partridge / Rode Patrijs** - *Alectoris rufa*
 6 March 1 Navahonda.
 8 March 1 south of El Casar.
 4 east of Talamanca de Jarama.
19. **Eurasian Coot / Meerkoet** - *Fulica atra*
 7 March c 20 Embalse de Valmayor, along the M505 between El Escorial and Galapagar; also on 8 March.
20. **Great Bustard / Grote Trap** - *Otis tarda*
 8 March 3 south of El Casar, east of road 111.
 14 southeast of Talamanca de Jarama, east of road 103.
 c 30 (previous 14 probably included) east of Talamanca de Jarama, north of road 320.
21. **Little Bustard / Kleine Trap** - *Tetrax tetrax*
 8 March 1 (male) south of Fuente el Saz de Jarama, along road 103.
22. **Eurasian Thick-knee / Griel** - *Burhinus oedichnemus*
 8 March 1 south of Fuente el Saz de Jarama, along road 103.
 1 east of Talamanca de Jarama.
23. **Northern Lapwing / Kievit** - *Vanellus vanellus*
 8 March c 100 in the triangle Valdetorres de Jarama, Fuente el Saz de Jarama and El Casar.
24. **Green Sandpiper / Witgatje** - *Tringa ochropus*
 8 March 1 in a roadside pool east of Talamanca de Jarama, just south of road 320.
25. **Lesser Black-backed Gull / Kleine Mantelmeeuw** - *Larus fuscus*
 8 March c 250 (several flocks in v-formation passing) El Pardo.
26. **Black-headed Gull / Kokmeeuw** - *Larus ridibundus*
 7-8 March c 10 Embalse de Valmayor, along the M505 between El Escorial and Galapagar.
27. **Common Wood-Pigeon / Houtduif** - *Columba palumbus*
 Common and widespread, seen daily.
28. **Eurasian Collared-Dove / Turkse Tortel** - *Streptopelia decaocto*
 9 March c 100 (only place where we saw it!) Fuente el Saz de Jarama.
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29. **Little Owl / Steenuil** - *Athene noctua*
 8 March 1 El Pardo.
30. **Eurasian Hoopoe / Hop** - *Upupa epops*
 7 March 2 (1 seen, 1 heard calling) valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
31. **Great Spotted Woodpecker / Grote Bonte Specht** - *Dendrocopos major*
 7 March c 3 (heard calling) valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
 1 (drumming in a telegraph pole) road 562.
32. **Iberian Green Woodpecker / Iberische Groene Specht** - *Picus viridis sharpei*
 7-8 March c 5 (heard calling) valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
33. **Thekla Lark / Thekla Leeuwerik** - *Galerida theklae*
 6 March 3-4 between Robledo de Chavela and Fresnedillos.
 8 March c 10 between Robledo de Chavela and Fresnedillos.
 We have seen several 'crested' larks along the road, but stopping along the road is very dangerous or simply impossible. The only Thekla Larks we were sure of were these birds which did the right calls and songs.
34. **Wood Lark / Boomleeuwerik** - *Lullula arborea*
 6 March 2 Navahonda.
 7-8 March c 8 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
35. **Barn Swallow / Boerenzwaluw** - *Hirundo rustica*
 Seen regularly, with 5-10 birds each day.
36. **Eurasian Crag-Martin / Rotszwaluw** - *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
 7 March 5 at a bridge on northern site of the Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
 8 March 3 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
37. **House-Martin / Huiszwaluw** - *Delichon urbica*
 8 March 7 El Pardo.
38. **Meadow Pipit / Graspieper** - *Anthus pratensis*
 6 March 1 Navahonda.
 7 March 1 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
39. **White Wagtail / Witte Kwikstaart** - *Motacilla alba*
 Common with c 10-20 seen daily.
40. **Grey Wagtail / Grote Gele Kwikstaart** - *Motacilla cinerea*
 7 March 2 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
41. **Firecrest / Vuurgoudhaan** - *Regulus ignicapillus*
 8 March 3-4 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
42. **Winter Wren / Winterkoninkje** - *Troglodytes troglodytes*
 6 March 1 Navahonda.
 7-8 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey
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43. **Eurasian Blackbird / Merel** - *Turdus merula*
Common with c 25-50 seen daily.
44. **Fieldfare / Kramsvogel** - *Turdus pilaris*
6 March c 10 west of Navahonda
7 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
45. **Mistle Thrush / Grote Lijster** - *Turdus viscivorus*
7 March 2 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
46. **Sardinian Warbler / Kleine Zwartkop** - *Sylvia melanocephala*
7-8 March 3-5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
47. **Dartford Warbler / Provençaalse Grasmus** - *Sylvia undata*
8 March 4 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
48. **European Robin / Roodborst** - *Erithacus rubecula*
Seen (mostly heard) regularly in all forested areas and villages.
49. **Black Redstart / Zwarte Roodstaart** - *Phoenicurus ochruros*
6 March 3 west of Navahonda
7 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
8 March 1 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
50. **European Stonechat / Roodborsttapuit**- *Saxicola rubicola*
Seen regularly along roadsides of 512, 510 and 600 and c 5 birds seen along the dirt road in the east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
51. **Long-tailed Tit / Staartmees** - *Aegithalos caudatus*
7-8 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
52. **Coal Tit / Zwarte Mees** - *Periparus ater*
7-8 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
53. **Crested Tit / Kuifmees** - *Lophophanes cristatus*
7 March c 10 (most common tit here) valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
c 5 El Pardo.
8 March c 10 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
54. **Great Tit / Koolmees** - *Parus major*
Commonly seen – but less common than Crested or Blue Tit - in all forested areas and villages.
55. **Eurasian Blue Tit / Pimpelmees** - *Cyanistes caeruleus*
Commonly seen in all forested areas and villages.
56. **Eurasian Nuthatch / Boomklever** - *Sitta europaea*
7 March c 10 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
1 El Pardo.
8 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
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57. **Short-toed Treecreeper / Boomkruiper** - *Certhia brachydactyla*
 7-8 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
58. **Southern Grey Shrike / Zuidelijke Klapekster** - *Lanius meridionalis*
 7 March 1 along the M505 between Galapagar and Las Rozas.
 8 March 1 between Robledo de Chavela and Fresnedillos.
59. **Eurasian Jay / Gaai** - *Garrulus glandarius*
 7 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
60. **Eurasian Magpie / Ekster** - *Pica pica*
 Common to abundant along roadsides and in villages.
61. **Azure-winged Magpie / Blauwe Ekster** - *Cyanopica cyana*
 Common with flocks up to 30-50 along roadsides and in villages.
62. **Eurasian Jackdaw / Kauw** - *Corvus monedula*
 7 March c 50 El Pardo.
63. **Carrion Crow / Zwarte Kraai** - *Corvus corone*
 7 March c 5 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
64. **Common Raven / Raaf** - *Corvus corax*
 Common, seen daily in the mountainous areas, with up to 20 birds each day.
65. **Spotless Starling / Zwarte Spreeuw** - *Sturnus unicolor*
 Common to abundant along roadsides and in villages.
66. **House Sparrow / Huismus** - *Passer domesticus*
 Common and widespread along all roadsides, towns and villages.
67. **Chaffinch / Vink** - *Fringilla coelebs*
 7-8 March c 20 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
68. **Eurasian Siskin / Sijs** - *Carduelis spinus*
 7 March 2 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
69. **European Goldfinch / Putter** - *Carduelis carduelis*
 Rather common in forested areas and villages, with up to 20 birds seen each day.
70. **European Serin / Europese Kanarie** - *Serinus serinus*
 Common and widespread in all forested areas and villages.
71. **Hawfinch / Appelvink** - *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
 7 March 1 El Pardo
72. **Rock Bunting / Grijze Gors** - *Emberiza cia*
 6 March 1 c 10 km south of Robledo de Chavela.
 7-8 March 2 valley east of Embalse de San Juan, west of Navas del Rey.
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73. **Corn Bunting / Grauwe Gors** - *Emberiza calandra*

Common and widespread along all roadsides.



Eurasian Thick-knee - *Burhinus oedicnemus* Valdetorres de Jarama.
8 March 2008 © Cor Hopman 2008.



Southern Grey Shrike - *Lanius meridionalis* near Fresnedillas.
8 March 2008 © Cor Hopman 2008.



Red Kite - *Milvus milvus* between Fresnedillas and Pajares.
8 March 2008 © Jan van der Laan 2008.