

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Extremadura

14th – 21st March 2009

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Holiday participants

Christine Willey
Malcolm and Jane Key
Geoff and Hazel Woodard
Peter Rathbone
Bill Stuart

Leaders

Martin Kelsey (*right*)
Chris Durdin (*kneeling*)



Our base for the holiday was the lovely Finca Santa Marta www.fincasantamarta.com

Report by Martin Kelsey (Sunday afternoon to Friday) and Chris Durdin (both Saturdays and Sunday morning). Bird list by Martin, other lists by Chris.

Photos by Chris Durdin, except group photo taken by João with Malcolm's camera.
Front cover: French lavender in Monfragüe National Park.

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As with all Honeyguide holidays, part of the price of the holiday was put towards a conservation project, in this case for La Sociedad Española de Ornitología (SEO), the Spanish Ornithological Society, and its work in Extremadura. The conservation contribution this year of £35 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, leading to a total of £315 – at this year's poor exchange rate just €335. During the holiday Marcelino Cardalliaguet of SEO came to Finca Santa Marta to collect a cheque from this year's holiday in Extremadura.

This year's donation brings the total given to SEO since the first Honeyguide holiday in Spain in 1991 to £11,475. The total for conservation contributions from all Honeyguide holidays was at £54,720 at the time of the holiday (March 2009).

Extremadura 14th – 21st March 2009

Itinerary

Saturday 14th March: Arrival in Madrid and travel to Trujillo via A5 motorway, with a stop before Ventas de Retamosa for snacks. Arrived at Finca Santa Marta late afternoon.

Sunday 15th March: Morning walk on property of Finca Santa Marta and beyond. After lunch visit to Belén Plains. Dinner in La Troya, Trujillo.

Monday 16th March: From Trujillo to Torrejón El Rubio, then to Monfragüe National Park. Stop at Castle and then at car park opposite the crags of Peña Falcón. Lunch at Mirador de Tajadilla, then to the Portilla del Tietár.

Tuesday 17th March: South to Zorita with a visit to part of the Zorita Plains and then towards Madrigalejo. Stop at Sierra Brava reservoir and coffee stop just outside Madrigalejo and then exploring area of Casas del Hito, including visit to Charca del Hito (a large pool), where lunch taken. Then visit to Vegas Altas. Drive to rice fields near Palazuelo with a walk beside Rio Ruercas

Wednesday 18th March: Free morning in Trujillo, then east towards Villuercas mountains, with lunch on Almonte river near village of Cabañas del Castillo. Visit to village after lunch, with walk along base of cliffs.

Thursday 19th March: Exploring plains around Santa Marta de Magasca, coffee at the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, with lunch on Tamuja River south of the village.

Friday 20th March: Visit to heathland at Jaraicejo, then Arrocampo reservoir, between Almaraz and Saucedilla, afternoon walk on Cerro de Almaraz.

Saturday 21st March: Early morning departure to Madrid to check-in at airport shortly after 10.15 am for flight back to UK.



Silene colorata

Daily diary

14th March: Madrid to Finca Santa Marta

The easyJet flight from Gatwick to Madrid was full but smooth and on time. Following a surprisingly long walk at Madrid's Terminal 1 to collect suitcases, where we exchanged numbers with some other birders (we met them later again in Monfragüe National Park), then the Europcar papers were sorted, minibus loaded and scratches logged. It was warm and sunny – the weather for the week – as we negotiated a route onto and along the M40, Madrid's ring road, then picked up the A5 to head west towards Extremadura and Portugal.

Martin had helpfully advised that our favourite lunchspot, called Las Esparteras, is just before the 49km exit and as it was 2pm English time, 3pm Spanish time, we were well ready for a drink and a snack. It's a bustling bar with a super selection of *raciones* – portions of all kinds of Spanish specialities – to put into or with a *bocadillo* (chunky sandwich). The bar is decorated with many hanging legs of *jamón serrano* – parma ham – which was one of several options for fillings. Quite a crowd gathered round a TV where Manchester United were losing 1-4 to Liverpool!

Outside, behind a hedge, we viewed a small pool where there were two little ringed plovers plus red-legged partridges, corn bunting and crested larks nearby. As we journeyed west, open windows proved better than air conditioning, even if this meant it was quite noisy. Two red kites, a brief view of a black-shouldered kite and increasing numbers of white storks were noted along the way.

The castle of Trujillo is an impressive sight before turning off the motorway for the short, last leg to Finca Santa Marta, the storks' nests on old eucalyptus trees making a distinctive landmark for the turn off. We arrived at 5.45. After being settled into our rooms, there was time to soak up the glorious surroundings. A large almond tree is the central focus of where the cars are parked, merging seamlessly into an old olive grove. Swallows, a blackcap, azure-winged magpies and those storks' nests were among the birds enjoyed, with the deep blue of undulate anchusa mixing with the creamy yellow of wild radish and the soft orange of field marigolds.



João, this year's management trainee at the Finca, returned from the railway station with our host Henri and at 7:30 we were tucking into appetisers in Henri's customary welcome gathering. He explained a little of what made the Finca tick, from almonds through grapes to the tourist trade. Then it was into the old olive-pressing room for dinner, accompanied by a wine from the *bodega* next door and a Moorish gecko on the wall (*see picture in checklists*).

15th March: Finca Santa Marta and Belén Plains

Peter and Bill were up early with the hoopoes and corn buntings and Chris introduced them to the song of the resident short-toed treecreeper. It's barely light until 7.30 so this allows for a morning routine of a quiet potter in the Finca's lovely grounds before breakfast at 8.30.



Martin had phoned to say he was stranded in Madrid last night – problems with his flight from Angola – which helped to confirm what was already a good plan: a walk through the Finca's grounds towards the umbrella pines at the top of the hill. So we set off into the almond orchard where the blossom was just fading away. Under the trees was a riot of colour, with two abundant crucifers. The easy one was the wild radish, with delicate purple veins on the petals. The second was a typically yellow crucifer, dominant in so many fields yet absent from the Mediterranean and Spanish flower books. Later, Chris was pleased to pin this down at last as tall rocket *Sisymbrium altissimum*.

Under the olives, farther up the hill, there were patches of ramping fumitory and tiny amethyst toadflaxes (*left*). A short-toed treecreeper sang from a line of cork oaks against a wall: a favourite spot all week, with the rugged bark presumably offering good feeding. A black vulture drifted into view over the Finca.

Near the umbrella pines we found a yellow star-of-Bethlehem or *Gagea*. Then we watched as a man appeared over the wall and picked stems of wild asparagus. It was a good corner for butterflies with a large tortoiseshell and scarce swallowtail flying around. We also hopped over the wall – there were easy steps – and followed the path a little farther up the hill. The search was

on for Iberian fritillaries – the flower fritillary, that is – and we were rewarded by a group in late bud by a tumble-down section of wall. They were in full flower for returning Honeyguiders later in the week, including Chris and Christine the following day. The ground had been left undisturbed in the adjacent olive plantation and it proved rich for orchids: many patches of champagne orchids and several conical orchids *Orchis conica*. By the wall to the right of the path were a few angel's tears narcissi and peering over the wall there were sheets of them in a closely cropped pasture.

Returning over the wall, we were lucky enough to arrive by the umbrella pines at the same time as a Spanish festoon butterfly that briefly perched on its larval food plant, birthwort, though whether that was by coincidence or to lay eggs we don't know. An excellent morning for butterflies was concluded with a Queen-of-Spain fritillary between the rows of vines as we returned.

Martin joined us at lunch, which was enjoyed in the gardens of the Finca. In the afternoon, we explored the open plains north-east of the small village of Belén close to Trujillo. At our first stop just outside the village we enjoyed a superb panorama of the habitat: the mosaic of colours reflecting the rotating land use with darker green fields of cereals, lighter green pastures, and fields that had been fallow showing a greyish tinge formed by the multitude of dead thistle stems. From this vantage point we located our first great bustards, a rather distant small group, and then two which were somewhat closer. Hoopoes perched obligingly on the stone wall beside the lane.

Shortly afterwards we stopped again in a gateway and looked back at the great bustards, six slowly and sedately striding across the gentle slope of the field. A nearby crested lark afforded excellent views. The laughing call of a great spotted cuckoo attracted our attention and, albeit at a distance, we watched one being chased by a magpie. Further along we stopped again and found small groups of calandra larks chasing each other low over the ground. Parties of goldfinches flew up from the verges. Remarkably, Chris spotted a tiny sawfly orchid on the verge as we drove, so a stop was made to photograph the solitary spike (*right*).



We enjoyed a short walk along a sunny track. Although few plants were yet in bloom, we found good numbers of two species of sand crocus. A pair of great spotted cuckoos settled in a bush close to the road and then moved onto a fence line. Overhead a line of griffon vultures cruised, with barely a flap of a wing. Back to Trujillo, we made a short stop at the bullring (*below*), where lesser kestrels were returning from their hunting forays over the plains.



Back at Finca Santa Marta we went through the checklists before heading to Trujillo for dinner at the La Troya, where Martin's wife Claudia and son Patrick joined us. Situated on the fine town square, the restaurant provided an excellent series of local dishes. In the square it was the last evening of the annual Mediaeval Fair and the stalls thronged by the townsfolk set a colourful scene.

16th March: Monfragüe National Park

Another very warm day and as we congregated after breakfast a pair of hawfinches flew over the car park and settled briefly on bare trees within view. We headed north from Trujillo to Monfragüe National Park. The route took us first through the rocky granite terrain around Trujillo, and then through dehesa as far as the eye could see, with the only changes being when we dropped down to cross three river valleys: the Tozo, the Almonte and finally the narrow Arroyo de la Vid. After the last crossing we followed the road winding up to the edge of the Monfragüe Park, heralded by a rocky ridge, capped by a small castle and a spectacular gorge through which passes the Tajo river.

Our first stop was the castle itself, reached by climbing up stone steps through groves of wild olive and cork oak. The view from the top was stunning: a vast dehesa panorama to the south, while to the north the hills of the park, the man-made lakes along the river valley and behind the snow-capped Gredos,

perfectly clear. From the top of the escarpment we could look down on passing griffon vultures, as well as a pair of red-billed choughs and raven.



A southern speckled wood found a sheltered wall to catch some sun. A distant flock of about 40 great cormorants was a surprise. Our next port of call was the famous Peña Falcón and Salto de Gitano (the Gypsy's leap). Here, close to the base of the gorge, we enjoyed more spectacular views of griffon vulture as well as some black vultures and a nesting pair of black storks. We also had excellent views of blue rock thrush and serin.

The road then took us over a bridge crossing the River Tajo, and we stopped briefly to admire the huge flock of nesting house martins, some rather distant alpine swifts and, best of all, a pair of short-toed eagles.

After a stop at Villareal de San Carlos to pick up leaflets about the park, we continued through to Tajadilla, a lovely picnic spot just downstream from one of the dams along the course of the river. It overlooked another rock face with nesting griffon vultures. Black kites and a magnificent pair of Egyptian vultures were present as well. Black storks made several appearances, including four in the sky at the same time on one occasion. A pair of Bonelli's eagles was also seen, soaring overhead briefly before heading south over the cliff. A nettle tree butterfly was seen quite well and a young red deer appeared coming down to the riverside.

At the Portilla the viewpoint directed our gaze onto the wonderful strata of the cliffs opposite, supporting another colony of griffon vultures. A pair of black storks stood on the highest part of the rock face, while a pair of cormorants swam in the river. It was rather quiet at first, although a common cuckoo was heard, but we enjoyed the wonderful serenity of the place. Then, just a minute after a short-toed eagle had passed overhead, spotted coming over the brow of the hill opposite was a fine adult Spanish imperial eagle which obligingly made a series of wide slow soaring circles, allowing the sunshine to catch the brilliant white leading edge of the wing.

Pottering along the road we found angel's tears (*picture in plant checklist*) and hoop petticoat narcissi growing side-by-side on the bank beside the road, along with Spanish bluebells and Spanish milk-vetch. As we returned to the vehicle Martin managed to find the sitting eagle owl on her nest, which had concealed itself well up until that point. All of us saw at least some movement of the cryptically

plumaged bird, and a lucky few also saw her wink! We returned to Finca Santa Marta for tea and checklist.

17th March: Madrigalejo

Although clear and sunny like yesterday, the easterly wind had picked up considerably and it remained breezy all day. We headed south, through the town of Zorita and then across the plains to the reservoir of Sierra Brava where we made a brief stop. The water was very choppy and apart from a great crested grebe and some black-headed and lesser black-backed gulls, little was seen.

Descending to the floodplains, which are a major rice-producing area, we entered the area known as Casas del Hito. Good views of southern grey shrike were obtained and a large colony of tree-nesting white storks. We had stopped to look at a greenshank and a rather fine breeding-plumaged water pipit when an Egyptian mongoose crossed the road in front of us. Passing through rather bare ploughed land we stopped to look at some showy Spanish sparrows before we reached an embanked pool. Walking along the bank we struggled in the wind to keep tripods steady as we scanned the water. There were groups of mallards and shovelers and also, rather surprisingly, a flock of six avocets swimming in the middle of the pool. On wet ground to the north of the pool we found a large scattered party of little ringed plovers, accompanied by a Kentish plover.

Martin then took time out to explain the current controversy here, a proposal for two solar-thermal power plants, with a network of electricity pylons. This area may look rather unpromising in March but several thousands of the some 80,000 wintering cranes in Extremadura come to roost here, and it's a designated Special Protection Area, so recognised as being valuable for birds in a European context.



SEO (BirdLife Spain) protested, supported by tourism interests in the regional government and scores of overseas objections, including from Honeyguide, yet the combined development/environment department's view proved dominant and it was recently approved by the *Junta* (regional government) of Extremadura. The next step for SEO is likely to be an appeal to the European Commission. The debate continued when Marcelino from SEO came to meet the group two days later.

After a coffee-stop we visited another area of mixed rice and wheat cultivations near the village of Vegas Altas. The wet fields there also had good numbers of water pipits – clearly a significant passage was underway. Patches of Barbary nut irises (*left*) were also out in flower. Other species seen included little egret and green sandpiper.

We completed the day with a very pleasant walk along the Via Verde long-distance path near the village of Fernando V. Some shelter was available on stretches and a few butterflies (clouded yellow, western dappled white and southern speckled wood) were on the wing. Cetti's warblers sung from the riverine vegetation and the plant list was augmented with star-of-Bethlehem, a yellow toadflax and more flowering Barbary nut iris.

18th March: Trujillo and Cabañas del Castillo

Another warm and sunny day, much calmer than yesterday. The group spent the morning at leisure in Trujillo, with the beautiful medieval town square as the starting point, from which the narrow cobbled streets lead up to the castle and old part of the town. This is dominated by the old granite-built palaces and large churches, testimony to the wealth brought back from South America by the Conquistadores born in Trujillo. The same buildings with their old tiled roofs support one of Spain's most important colonies of lesser kestrel as well as pairs of pallid swift.

At 12.30 we left Trujillo and headed to the Villuercas mountains, a lovely series of ridges to the east of the dehesa and plains that we had been exploring over the last few days. We stopped for lunch at a crossing of the Rio Almonte, where the river passes through a narrow gorge. As well as griffon vultures we saw a short-toed eagle, grey wagtails and a rock bunting. Nearby is the tiny village of Cabañas del Castillo, perched at the base of one of a pair of crags, on the top of which sits an ancient

castle. We walked through the village, then along a path leading to the old church and a gap between the crags, which affords a magnificent view of the valley to the east. A black wheatear was quickly found near the church while a peregrine on a lofty perch was also seen. The rocks above the village also held black redstarts and blue rock thrushes. From the vantage point overlooking the valley behind the village we could watch passing griffon vultures. Juniper and dwarf sheep's bit were found growing and on our return to the minibus another black wheatear was found and we were rewarded with a lovely view of a short-toed eagle set against a cloudless, deep blue sky. We returned to the Finca on a cross-country road through the dehesa, the highlight of the journey being a black stork.

19th March: Santa Marta de Magasca

Today we drove west of Trujillo and took the minor road towards Santa Marta de Magasca. Stopping at the edge of the plains we walked a track through a belt of *retama* broom, having several sightings of great spotted cuckoo as well as a pair of black-winged stilts which appeared from a dew pond. The lark song around us included calandra, crested and woodlark. We had sightings of several great bustards in flight and a fine male hen harrier also passed by. Careful scanning by Peter revealed one of the highlights of the walk, a group of about twelve pin-tailed sandgrouse, which provided good views in excellent light. From the same spot we also saw initially a male and female little bustard and then a flock of at least thirty. Returning to the minibus, a further dozen or so little bustards were seen.



Steppe near Santa Marta de Magasca

Continuing along the road we found a northern wheatear, woodchat shrike and stopped to watch a black vulture standing in a field, close to a sheep, to which it seemed comparable in size!

After a very pleasant stop for refreshments at Santa Marta de Magasca we headed south to the Rio Tamuja, set in a deep wooded valley. Here we had lunch in this wonderful spot. Within minutes of arriving we enjoyed the sight of a Bonelli's eagle and short-toed eagle close together. Later, the Bonelli's eagle reappeared with its mate for an encore. The valley was full of crag martins, with a few red-rumped swallows. Iberian water frogs croaked occasionally and clumps of common jonquil were also seen. We then drove towards the Cáceres road. Taking a small country lane for a few hundred metres we stopped near a pool that had an interesting set of species: lapwing, little ringed plover, cormorant, mallard and teal. Iberian terrapins were also present in number, sunning themselves on the bank. Proceeding along the road we stopped when we found a male Montagu's harrier on a fence post. Soon after taking off another joined it, and then a female, and we delighted in the spectacle of their display. Their small size only became apparent when a black kite came too close and was mobbed briefly by them. Green-striped white butterflies passed across the fields and as we retraced our steps we found a fine black-eared wheatear of the 'black-throated' form.

At the top of the road, we stopped to watch a flock of about seventy great bustards in a field right next to the road: a quite unforgettable view. A pair of short-toed eagles was also in courtship and as we returned to the road for Trujillo another black-eared wheatear was seen.

We returned to Finca Santa Marta for tea and checklist, and before dinner Marcelino Cardalliaguet (Extremadura representative of the Spanish Ornithological Society) gave an illustrated talk on bird conservation in Extremadura and received a cheque from Chris as a contribution from the group to continue SEO's work. Our guests at dinner were Steve and Karen Fletcher, bird photographers based locally.

20th March: Jaraicejo and Arrocampo

Remarkably, yet another sunny, cloudless day giving us an unbroken spell of sunshine throughout the whole holiday. It was also the warmest day of the week and we spent the first couple of hours visiting



the extensive lavender and retama-dominated heathland north of the small town of Jaraicejo. As we entered the heath a black-shouldered kite flew in front of us and briefly paused to perch on a bare tree nearby. Once on the heath we were soon enjoying good views of Thekla lark (*left*) and a series of sightings of Dartford warblers, including their jerky song-flight. Wandering down to a picturesque cork oak grove, a very brief snatch of western orphee warbler was heard, but sadly it did not call again. The grove was full of the sound of short-toed tree creeper and nuthatch, with calls of crested tit also picked up. Butterflies, including Spanish festoon and small copper, appeared as we returned to the van, but the highlight was an adult golden eagle soaring with vultures above us.

On to the reservoir of Arrocampo, where we visited first an agricultural zone to the north and quickly found a black-shouldered kite perched on a tree. Flocks of Spanish sparrow haunted shrubs close by. After lunch in the shade of trees we visited three parts of the Arrocampo site, where a wide belt of fringing vegetation provides suitable habitat for a variety of waterbirds. At the first stop we had excellent views of a great white egret and a little egret, while a water pipit and a bluethroat were seen by a few of us. The next stop offered us excellent views of purple swamp-hen and a wonderful squacco heron. Purple herons were also present and Savi's warblers sang in the distance. Finally, at a third site we made a short walk and were lucky enough to find an old penduline tit's nest which was being visited by a male who appeared to be raiding it for a new nest.

We completed the afternoon with a very pleasant foray onto part of the limestone hill nearby (Cerro de Almaraz) where we found five species of orchid (naked man, conical, mirror, sawfly and woodcock). We could happily have spent more time exploring there, but the afternoon warmth on our backs also encouraged thoughts of cold drinks and ice cream, so we repaired to a nearby bar before returning to the Finca where we had our final afternoon tea and checklist call-over.

21st March: Finca Santa Marta to Madrid

We set off at 6.45 am for the airport, in the direction of the rising sun. Nearing Madrid, we took Martin's advice and tried the new, surprisingly cheap and near-deserted R5 toll road, re-fuelling at the second of its two service stations. We had an easy run to the airport, arriving in good time to return the minibus, to say farewell to Peter who was off to a hotel to wait for his evening flight to Liverpool, then check-in and return to Gatwick.

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Wildlife sightings of the week, as nominated by group members

Christine: storks - black in its cave and white in tenements - and their ingenuity; abundance of herons at Arrocampo.

Bill: too many to mention; the group.

Peter: a return to Finca Santa Marta for the third time; superb weather; pin-tailed sandgrouse.

Geoff: lesser kestrels, with certainty; 70 great bustards; the sandgrouse; Monfragüe's scenery.

Hazel: same great weather all week; two good guides.

Malcolm: so many first time sightings; the landscape, especially the holm oak as far as the eye can see from Cabañas de Castillo; sky populated with raptors.

Jane: raptors; bustards; this afternoon's orchids *en masse*.

Martin: views of Montagu's harriers.

Chris: amethyst toadflax and finally sorting out the ID of tall rocket; Bonelli's eagles; the Finca's grounds; Venus as such an obvious crescent in the clear night sky.

Systematic list – Birds

A summary of sightings contributed by the whole group at the daily 'call-over'.

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| Little Grebe | Sightings of singles on two days on small pools. |
| Great Crested Grebe | One bird seen in very choppy water on Sierra Brava reservoir on 17 th March and several at Arrocampo on 20 th . |
| Cormorant | Seen almost daily along rivers and on water bodies as well as a flock of 40 over Monfragüe on 16 th March. |
| Squacco Heron | The one below seen at close quarters at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |



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| Cattle Egret | Small flocks seen on the rice fields and at Arrocampo. |
| Little Egret | Small numbers seen near Trujillo on 15 th March, on River Almonte on 18 th March and at Arrocampo on 20 th . |
| Great White Egret | Two or three at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Grey Heron | Seen almost every day. |
| Purple Heron | Two seen at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Black Stork | About ten seen at Monfragüe on 16 th March and one near Madroñera on 18 th March. |
| White Stork | Common throughout the week, around towns and villages, as well as in the fields. |
| Gadwall | Two pairs at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Teal | A pair on a pool near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Mallard | Seen almost daily. |
| Shoveler | About ten on a pool at Casas del Hito on 17 th March. |
| Black-shouldered Kite | One seen along motorway on 14 th March, one at heathland at Jaraicejo and one at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Black Kite | Double figures seen every day. |
| Red Kite | Single figures seen every day, especially over dehesa and the plains. |
| Egyptian Vulture | About six seen at Monfragüe on 16 th March. |

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| Griffon Vulture | Good numbers seen every day, especially at Monfragüe on 16 th March (over 100 seen). |
| Black Vulture | Seen daily, and double figures at Monfragüe. |
| Short-toed Eagle | Seen almost daily, often in pairs. |
| Marsh Harrier | About five on the rice fields on 17 th March with singles near Trujillo, on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and at Arrocampo. |
| Hen Harrier | A male on Belén Plains on 15 th March, a female on the ricefields on 17 th March and a male on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Montagu's Harrier | Two males and a female on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Sparrowhawk | One on 15 th March near the Finca was the only sighting. |
| Common Buzzard | Seen almost daily. |
| Spanish Imperial Eagle | One bird soaring at Portilla del Tiétar in Monfragüe on 16 th March. |
| Golden Eagle | An adult soaring over the heath at Jaraicejo on 20 th March. |
| Bonelli's Eagle | A pair at the Tajadilla in Monfragüe on 16 th March and a pair over Rio Tamuja near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Lesser Kestrel | Seen daily in double figures. Excellent views obtained in Trujillo of this exquisite little falcon. |
| Common Kestrel | Seen almost daily in single figures. |
| Peregrine | Two at Cabañas del Castillo on 18 th March. |
| Red-legged Partridge | Seen most days. |
| Water Rail | Heard on Rio Ruercas on 17 th March. |
| Moorhen | Small numbers on rice fields and Arrocampo. |
| Purple Swamp-hen | Excellent views of at least five birds at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Coot | Present at the reservoir of Arrocampo. |
| Little Bustard | 40 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Great Bustard | 10 on Belén Plains on 15 th March, but these were outshone by about 100 on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, including a flock of about 70 close to the road on 19 th March. |
| Avocet | A party of six at Casas del Hito on 17 th March. |
| Black-winged Stilt | Two seen flying from a small pool on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Little Ringed Plover | Seen almost daily, the largest number was about 15 on wet fields at Casas del Hito on 17 th March. |
| Kentish Plover | One at Casas del Hito on 17 th March. |

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| Lapwing | Very few of this winter visitor still present: 5 west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March were the only records. |
| Snipe | Two at Casas del Hito on 17 th March and one at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Greenshank | One at Casas del Hito on 17 th March and one at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Green Sandpiper | About ten on rice fields on 17 th March and singles on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March and at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Common Sandpiper | Two at Casas del Hito on 17 th March and one at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Black-headed Gull | Small groups seen near Santa Marta de Magasca, Arrocampo, Sierra Brava and on the rice fields. |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | One at Sierra Brava reservoir on 17 th March. |
| Pin-tailed Sandgrouse | About 15 seen well on the ground on plains east of Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon | Seen daily |
| Woodpigeon | Small numbers seen almost daily. |
| Collared Dove | Seen daily. |
| Great Spotted Cuckoo | Seen almost daily, generally in pairs. |
| Common Cuckoo | Heard at Monfragüe, Santa Marta de Magasca and near Jaraicejo. |
| Scops Owl | Heard several evenings at the Finca. |
| Eagle Owl | Female at the nest at Monfragüe on 16 th March. |
| Pallid Swift | Excellent views at Trujillo on 18 th March. |
| Alpine Swift | Seen distantly at Monfragüe. |
| Kingfisher | One at Rio Ruercas on 17 th March. |
| Hoopoe | Commonly seen every day. |
| Green Woodpecker | Heard at the Finca on 20 th March. |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | Heard drumming at Monfragüe. |
| Lesser Spotted Woodpecker | Heard drumming at Jaraicejo. |
| Calandra Lark | Seen on visits to open plains at Belén, near Santa Marta de Magasca and at Jaraicejo. |
| Crested Lark | Common and seen daily. |
| Thekla Lark | Excellent views of several at Jaraicejo on 20 th March. |
| Woodlark | Heard and sometimes seen almost daily at the Finca. |
| Sand Martin | Seen at Casas del Hito on 17 th March and common at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |

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| Crag Martin | Common near bridges and in rocky areas in Monfragüe, in the Villuercas mountains and near Santa Marta de Magasca, also present in Trujillo. |
| Swallow | Common every day. |
| Red-rumped Swallow | Seen almost daily. |
| House Martin | Seen almost every day. |
| Meadow Pipit | Small numbers seen almost daily. |
| Water Pipit | Large numbers (30+) on the rice fields, many in breeding plumage on 17 th March and one at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Grey Wagtail | Four or five present on Rio Almonte on 18 th March. |
| White Wagtail | Seen every day. |
| Wren | Recorded daily. |
| Robin | Small numbers seen almost daily. |
| Bluethroat | One at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Black Redstart | Present around the Finca and also seen at Monfragüe and Cabañas del Castillo. |
| Stonechat | Common and seen every day. |
| Northern Wheatear | One east of Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Black-eared Wheatear | Two west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Black Wheatear | Two birds at Cabañas del Castillo on 18 th March. |
| Blue Rock Thrush | Seen in Monfragüe on 16 th March and Cabañas del Castillo on 18 th March. |
| Blackbird | Seen daily. |
| Song Thrush | Seen daily. |
| Mistle Thrush | Singles seen at Monfragüe and in the Villuercas. |
| Cetti's Warbler | Heard on 17 th March and at Arrocampo (one seen) on 20 th March. |
| Zitting Cisticola | Heard and seen almost daily. |
| Savi's Warbler | Three or four singing at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Dartford Warbler | Two or three singing near Jaraicejo on 20 th March. |
| Sardinian Warbler | Seen almost daily. |
| Western Orphean Warbler | One brief burst of song at Jaraicejo on 20 th March |
| Blackcap | Seen daily and in good numbers around Finca. |
| Chiffchaff | Seen on one day near the Finca and small numbers at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |

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| Firecrest | One near Monfragüe castle on 11 th March and one at Valdecañas on 14 th March. |
| Long-tailed Tit | Small numbers seen most days. |
| Blue Tit | Seen daily. |
| Great Tit | Seen daily. |
| Penduline Tit | A male singing and seen collecting nest material from an old nest at Arrocampo on 20 th March. |
| Short-toed Treecreeper | Seen and heard almost daily, especially around the Finca. |
| Southern Grey Shrike | Seen almost daily. |
| Woodchat Shrike | Two birds south of Monfragüe on 16 th March and one near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19 th March. |
| Jay | Seen once near the Finca and also at Monfragüe. |
| Azure-winged Magpie | Common and seen every day. |
| Magpie | Common and seen every day. |
| Red-billed Chough | Two at Monfragüe castle on 16 th March. |
| Jackdaw | Common and seen almost every day. |
| Raven | Seen almost daily. |
| Spotless Starling | Common every day. |
| House Sparrow | Common every day. |
| Spanish Sparrow | Flocks on the rice fields and at Arrocampo. |
| Tree Sparrow | Two or three at Casas del Hito on 17 th March. |
| Red Avadavat | Small flocks on the rice fields on 17 th March. |
| Chaffinch | Small numbers seen every day. |
| Serin | Seen every day, often in song-flight. |
| Greenfinch | Seen daily near the Finca. |
| Goldfinch | Small flocks seen daily: over 30 on Belén Plains. |
| Siskin | Two near Rio Ruercas on 17 th March. |
| Linnet | Seen almost daily. |
| Hawfinch | Recorded on two mornings at the Finca, as well as at Monfragüe on 16 th March. |
| Rock Bunting | Seen briefly at Monfragüe on 16 th March, in the Villuercas on 18 th March and by the Rio Tamuja on 19 th March. |
| Corn Bunting | Seen almost daily. One of the commonest birds of the plains. |

MAMMALS

Egyptian mongoose *Herpestes ichneumon*

Wild boar *Sus scrofa* – rootings

Red deer *Cervus elaphus hispanicus*. The Iberian subspecies is darker and smaller than the nominate species.

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Vole sp – on distribution Mediterranean pine vole *Microtus duodecimcostatus*

Iberian mole *Talpa occidentalis* – mole hills

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Spanish (stripe-necked) terrapin *Mauremys leprosa*

Large psammodromus *Psammodromus algirus*

Iberian wall lizard *Podarcis hispanica*

Moorish gecko *Tarentola mauretanica* (right)

Stripeless tree frog *Hyla meridionalis* (heard)

Iberian water frog *Rana perezi*



BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail

Scarce swallowtail

Spanish festoon

Large white

Small white

Green-striped white

Western dappled white

Clouded yellow

Cleopatra

Nettle-tree butterfly

Large tortoiseshell

Red admiral

Painted lady

Small heath

Southern speckled wood

Green hairstreak

Small copper

Holly blue

Brown argus

Queen-of-Spain fritillary

Mallow skipper

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

A large pond skater, probably *Aquarius najas*

Mole cricket *Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*

Rhinoceros beetle *Copris lunaris*

7-spot ladybird *Coccinella 7-punctata*

A ground bug *Lygaeus equestris*

Another red-and-black ground bug

Spilostethus pandurus (right)

Pine processionary moth *Thaumetopoea pityocampa* tents

Purple-barred yellow moth (day-flying) *Lythria cruentaria* (right, below)

Violet carpenter bee *Xylocopa violacea*

Paper wasp *Polistes* sp

A bee-fly sp *Bombyliidae*

Large ant possibly *Camponotus vagus*



PLANTS

Numbers on the right refer to Blamey & Grey-Wilson, *Mediterranean Wild Flowers*.

Polunin refers to Polunin & Smythies, *Flowers of south-west Europe*.

Some are planted, marked P. NiF = not in flower.

Common northern European plants e.g. shepherd's purse, groundsel, are not usually noted; planted trees are only noted when of special interest. The shrubs in the courtyard at Finca Santa Marta (picture, page 19) that according to Malcolm Key should be in everyone's garden are *Stranvaesia* (or *Photinia*) *daurica*.

Pinaceae

Pinus pinea Stone / umbrella pine (3)

Cupressaceae

Juniperus communis Common juniper (13)

Fagaceae

Quercus rotundifolia Holm oak (26)

Quercus suber Cork oak (27)

Ulmaceae

Ulmus minor Elm sp. (c. 38)

Celtis australis P Southern nettle-tree (39)

Urticaceae

Urtica membranacea Membranous nettle (49)

U. urens Annual nettle (-)

Aristolochiaceae

Aristolochia paucinervis Birthwort sp. (c. 64)

Caryophyllaceae

Paronychia argentea Paronychia (136)

Spergularia arvensis Corn spurrey (-)

Spergularia purpurea Purple sand-spurrey (148)

Silene colorata Mediterranean campion sp. (180)

Ranunculaceae

Ranunculus sp. Water crowfoot sp.

Ranunculus macrophyllus Large-leaved buttercup (237)

Ranunculus sceleratus Celery-leaved buttercup (251)

Fumariaceae

Fumaria capreolata Ramping fumitory (303)

Cruciferae

Matthiola lunata A stock (photo in Polunin)

Sisymbrium altissimum Tall rocket. The abundant yellow crucifer in fields and on disturbed ground everywhere.

Raphanus raphanistrum Wild radish (369)

Crassulaceae

Umbilicus rupestris Navelwort (396)

Saxifragaceae

Saxifraga tridactyla Rue-leaved saxifrage

Leguminosae

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Acacia dealbata</i> P | 'Mimosa' or Silver wattle (432) |
| <i>Adenocarpus argyrophyllus</i> | Spanish adenocarpus (endemic to Extremadura - in neither book) |
| <i>Astragalus lusitanicus</i> | Iberian milk-vetch (504) |
| <i>Cercis siliquastrum</i> P | Judas tree (430) |
| <i>Cytisus multiflorus</i> | White broom |
| <i>Lathyrus cicera</i> | A vetchling of cultivated fields (545) |
| <i>Lupinus angustifolius</i> | Narrow-leaved lupin (486) |
| <i>Medicago arabica</i> | Spotted medick (623) |
| <i>Scorpiurus muricatus</i> | Annual scorpion vetch (684) |
| <i>Trifolium suffocatum</i> | Suffocated clover |
| <i>Trifolium tomentosum</i> | Woolly trefoil (658) |
| <i>Vicia hybrida</i> | Hairy yellow vetchling vetch (527) |
| <i>Vicia lutea</i> | Yellow vetch (525) |
| <i>Vicia sativa</i> | Common vetch (531) |
| <i>Vicia villosa</i> | Fodder vetch (510) |

Oxalidaceae

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i> | Bermuda buttercup (735) |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|

Geraniaceae

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Geranium lucidum</i> | Shining cranesbill |
| <i>Geranium molle</i> | Dovesfoot cranesbill (741) |
| <i>Erodium cicutarium</i> | Common storksbill (761) |

Euphorbiaceae

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i> | Sun spurge (700) |
| <i>Mercurialis annua</i> | Annual mercury (820) |

Meliaceae

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Melia azedarach</i> P | Indian bead tree or Persian lilac (843) |
|--------------------------|---|

Violaceae

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Viola (arvensis) kitaibeliana</i> | Dwarf pansy (931) |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|

Cistaceae

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| <i>Cistus albidus</i> | Grey-leaved cistus (big pink fls) (961) NiF |
| <i>Cistus clusii</i> | (969) |
| <i>Cistus salviifolius</i> | Sage-leaved cistus (small white) (965) |
| <i>Cistus ladanifer</i> | Gum cistus (big white fls) (971) |
| <i>Tuberaria guttata</i> | Spotted rockrose (small yellow) (985) |

Cactaceae

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| <i>Opuntia maxima</i> (= <i>ficus-indica</i>) | Prickly pear (1040) |
|--|---------------------|

Umbelliferae

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Ferula communis</i> | Giant fennel (1141) NiF |
| <i>Smyrniololustatum</i> | Alexanders (1087) |
| <i>Scandix pecten-veneris</i> | Shepherd's needle (1097) |

Ericaceae

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Arbutus unedo</i> | Strawberry tree (1176) |
| <i>Erica arborea</i> | Tree heath (pink fls in EX) (1178) |
| <i>Erica lusitanica</i> | Portuguese heath (white fls) (1179) |

Primulaceae

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Anagallis arvensis</i> | Scarlet pimpernel (1198) |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|

Rubiaceae

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Galium verticillatum</i> | A tiny bedstraw (1299) |
| <i>Sherardia arvensis</i> | Field madder |

Oleaceae

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| <i>Phillyrea angustifolia</i> | (1246) |
| <i>Olea europaea</i> | Olive (1248) |
| <i>Olea europaea</i> spp <i>oleaster</i> | Wild olive (1248a) |

Boraginaceae

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Echium plantagineum</i> | Purple viper's bugloss (1383) |
| <i>Anchusa undulata</i> | Undulate anchusa (1406) |

Labiatae

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| <i>Lamium bifidum</i> | A white-flowered deadnettle with white stripes on the leaves. Not in Blamey or Polunin! |
| <i>Marrubium vulgare</i> | White horehound (1445) NiF |
| <i>Lamium amplexicaule</i> | Henbit deadnettle (1478) |
| <i>Lavandula stoechas</i> | French lavender (1528) |
| <i>Salvia verbenaca</i> | Wild clary (1545) |
| <i>Stachys arvensis</i> | Field woundwort |

Solanaceae

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Hyoscyamus albus</i> | White henbane (1555) |
|-------------------------|----------------------|

Scrophularicaea

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Linaria amethystea</i> | 'Amethyst' toadflax (Polunin) |
| <i>Linaria sparteae</i> | A yellow-flowered toadflax (Polunin) |

Caprifoliaceae

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Lonicera caprifolium</i> | Perfoliate honeysuckle (Polunin etc) |
| <i>Viburnum tinus</i> | Laurestinus (1711) |

Campanulaceae

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>Jasione crispa</i> | Dwarf sheep's bit (Polunin 1355c, but illustrated in Blamey / Grey-Wilson's <u>Alpine</u> flowers) |
|-----------------------|--|

Compositae

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Anthemis</i> sp. <i>arvensis</i> ? | An abundant white (corn?) mayweed |
| <i>Bellis annua</i> | Annual daisy (1791) |
| <i>Bellis perennis</i> | Perennial daisy (1792) |
| <i>Bellis sylvestris</i> | Southern daisy (1793) |
| <i>Calendula arvensis</i> | Field marigold (1908) |
| <i>Evax pygmaea</i> | Evax (1805) |
| <i>Galactites tomentosa</i> | Galactites (1971) NiF |
| <i>Silybum marianum</i> | Milk Thistle (1982) NiF |

Liliaceae

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Asphodelus fistulosus</i> | Hollow-leaved asphodel (2087) |
| <i>Asphodelus aestivus</i> | Common asphodel (2089) |
| <i>Gagea sp pratensis</i> ? | Yellow star-of-Bethlehem sp. (c 2106) |
| <i>Fritillaria lusitanica</i> | Iberian fritillary (2152) |
| <i>Ornithogalum ?narbonense</i> | Star-of-Bethlehem sp. (2171) |
| <i>Urginea maritima</i> | Sea squill (leaves & dead flower spikes) (2163) |
| <i>Hyacinthoides hispanica</i> | Spanish bluebell (2191) |
| <i>Allium subhirsutum</i> | A white-flowered onion (2227) |
| <i>Narcissus triandrus papyraceus</i> | Angel's tears (Polunin) (<i>right</i>) |
| <i>Narcissus jonquilla</i> | Common jonquil (2279) |
| <i>Narcissus bulbocodium</i> | Hoop-petticoat narcissus (2281) |



Iridaceae

Gynandriris sisyrinchium
Romulea bulbocodium
Romulea columnae

Barbary nut iris (2305)
 A sand crocus (2314)
 Sand crocus (2320)

Orchidaceae:

Orchis (morio) champagneuxii
Orchis conica
Orchis italica

Champagne orchid (2403)
 Conical orchid
 Naked (Italian) man orchid (2409) (*below*)



Ophrys tenthredinifera
Ophrys scolopax
Ophrys speculum

Sawfly orchid (2442)
 Woodcock orchid (2436)
 Mirror orchid (2436)

Gramineae:

Lamarckia aurea
Typha angustifolia
Arundo donax

Golden dog's-tail (2459)
 Lesser reedmace
 Giant reed (2494)

FERNS (PTERIDOPHYTA)

Ceterach officinarum
Polypodium sp

Rusty-back fern (2532)
 A polypody



Courtyard at Finca Santa Marta with stork's nest