

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Extremadura
6 – 13 March 1999

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The group

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Anne & Colin Davies

Pete Etheridge

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Mike Freer

Rex Glover

Margaret & Manfred Gorlin

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Margaret Silcocks

Neville Skinner

Kathy Archibald

Leaders

Rob Macklin

Suffolk

Graham Hearl

Mallorca

Daily log by Graham Hearl, bird checklist by Rob Macklin, flower highlights by Kathy Archibald, illustrations by Rob Hume. Front cover: white storks at Trujillo

As with all Honeyguide holidays, £25 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. During the holiday, Carlota Viada Sauleda of SEO's Madrid office twice came to Trujillo to collect the cheque for £830 from this year's two holidays in Extremadura (£25 per person x 32 plus an extra donation). This was then topped up by further generous contributions when Graham auctioned spare wine.

This brings the total given to SEO since the first Honeyguide holiday in Spain in 1991 to £4,650, and the total from all Honeyguide holidays to £17,425 (at the end the 1999 season). A thank-you letter from Carlota appears at the end of this report (but not this web version).

Extremadura 6-13 March 1999

Saturday 6th March - Travel Day

Rob travelled with the party from Gatwick while I met up with them at Barajas airport, Madrid, having flown direct from Mallorca. The flight was on time and having sorted how to work the handbrake on our new Mercedes minibuses we were off to Extremadura. We encountered some traffic around Madrid but still arrived just before 10-30 pm in time for a meal of which most of the party partook.

Sunday 7th March - Belén Plain

A good start as just outside of the village of Belén we immediately found Spanish Sparrows - in previous years a hard-to-find species but here they were all over the plain. Southern Grey Shrike caused some excitement and, of course, White Storks were the stars of the early morning. Travelling farther into the plain we encountered Little and Great Bustard at some distance but much better was to come. We walked down a wide track and Dale spotted a group of 13 Great Bustards at some distance. We walked slowly and quietly getting better and better views until we could actually see their whiskers - what a sight.

In the meantime we had been collecting bird of prey sightings and here we added a female Hen Harrier to go with Black and Griffon Vultures, Common and Lesser Kestrels, Common Buzzard, Red Kite and a somewhat distant Egyptian Vulture - not a bad start. After this stunning morning we stopped for lunch near a White Stork colony seeing, among other things, a really nice fresh Spanish Festoon butterfly.

After lunch we continued round the Belén plain, stopping at a garage for LOTS of tissues for the two Kathys. We finished our day walking beside the Río Almonte seeing Green Sandpiper, two Kingfishers, Serin, our third Short-toed Eagle and not forgetting the dozen or so Azure-winged Magpies that greeted us on arrival. We returned to base tired but very happy. How could we continue this on the morrow?

Monday 8th March - Monfragüe

After a fairly early breakfast we decided to go to Monfragüe. We stopped for short time at Arroya de la Vid with no real success and then continued on to the Castillo de Monfragüe. This entailed a short sharp climb up some steps to magnificent views over the surrounding countryside and real close-ups of vultures, especially Griffons. Dale and I found a Dartford Warbler when descending from the Castillo which was really close and stayed long enough to give excellent views.

We then moved on to the Peña Falcon viewpoint by the road where Kathy Archibald spotted a Black Wheatear way across the Río Tajo - was Dale pleased!! YES - one of his wanted species. We missed Rock Bunting for most but Neville got a good view. We needed moved on and stopped for a coffee at Villareal de San Carlos.

The viewpoint over the Río Tajo at the Embalse de Torrejon for Griffons was our lunch-stop. We then spent an hour looking for large raptors at La Bascula with some success with a rather distant Golden Eagle, many Short-toed Eagles, Griffon and Black Vultures plus a Subalpine Warbler close by. It was here that Kathy scored again when she spotted, at very long distance, a flock of nine birds purposefully travelling north. These turned out to be Common Cranes when they came right over our heads, rather late as most of their congeners had already left the area but a very good sighting for us Honeyguiders. We worked very hard at this viewpoint for Spanish Imperial Eagle to no avail, but Dale really came into his own at the Tiétar cliffs when he said 'Oy look at this raptor' and yes, it was a Spanish Imperial Eagle. This bird started off quite close above us but soon travelled away at a rate of knots but most people had good views of this rare bird in this region. Time was marching on so we left this superb area and returned to Trujillo just in time for a toothbrush for Margaret.

This evening Carlota from SEO arrived to give us a good run-down of conservation in Extremadura and the Coto Doñana. Manfred gave her the cheque in good style; many questions were asked and

answered and we had finished two days of fantastic birding in this wonderful area - we could not wait for the following day. Our total at the log was approaching ninety - we were all trying to get ahead of Chris from his first Extremadura holiday last year.

Tuesday 9th March - Valdesalor

We changed today's venue as the weather forecast was not good for the following day, so we decided to head for Valdesalor, really the only steppe/plain where we could walk out on for any distance. Our journey west to Cáceres was eventful to say the least: doing 100 km per hour we spotted a Black-shouldered Kite on a roadside telegraph wire. Luckily for the leaders it decided to fly off so we did not have to think about disembarking 18 people by a dangerous road. Nonetheless most got brief but very close views of this stunning bird.

We then continued on to Cáceres, negotiated the town well and arrived at Valdesalor in good time. The weather was cold - certainly for me - but although it was cloudy it was dry above and underfoot so we went for it. Our first birds were a Great Spotted Cuckoo and a flock of nine Black Kites. The wind was cold but we headed up into the plain with only one big Mastin dog to greet us and that was behind a fence. Our walk produced various species including Golden Plover, but the stars here were a flock of Black-bellied Sandgrouse in flight, some quite close so everyone had good views eventually.

We lunched early behind a wall for shelter and returned to our vans. The three in front got very close to a flock of 50+ Common Waxbills, an escape in southern Europe which is doing rather well. We then headed back through Cáceres - always an interesting experience - and took the scenic route back to Trujillo just north of the main road. We immediately saw Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *very* close. They stayed for a few moments and then took off; however a probable breeding pair stayed well within 'scope range and gave everybody superb views of this difficult to see species; the male in full summer plumage was especially spectacular.

Along this road numerous flocks of Goldfinches were seen plus a stop overlooking a small pond gave us a female Montagu's Harrier to add to the Hen Harriers that we had previously seen. Trying to get back to base we headed into Santa Marga de Magasca. Oh dear! Road works were still in progress from the previous year and we had to negotiate very narrow streets to get out - a leader's nightmare. However we negotiated successfully and finished the day with very close views of three Great Bustards - a male and maybe two females or sub-adult males - anyway great views. Back at base our log now totalled 97 species; Rob was especially pleased to now have beaten Chris on his first visit!

Wednesday 10th March - Monroy

Our usual start after breakfast saw us taking the Monroy road just north of Trujillo on a windy and cold morning. We gained Cetti's warbler, heard at the first stop by a pool, but the main sightings for the morning were a flock of more than 70 Little Bustards, spotted by Dale with a few even stopping to give a good view on the ground, and another Great Spotted Cuckoo. Approaching Monroy we stopped at the Río Almonte where Rob spotted a high Red-rumped Swallow and told the first bus about a few Rock Sparrows seen in the yard of a nearby farm at the top of the gorge. We returned and achieved similar views to those obtained earlier.



We then continued to Monroy for a much needed coffee stop and lunched with Azure-winged Magpies a little farther north. At the next stop, along the ridge towards Torrejon El Rubio, we were walking down a track looking for anything when Mike called a Black-shouldered Kite in flight. This time we all had good views of the bird in flight and perched in the telescope - a much-wanted bird and not guaranteed on any trip.

With the day now getting away from us we returned via the Monfragüe road with Rob stopping at a couple of small reservoirs desperate for a Moorhen - he succeeded. Our total now for the trip was 105 - Rob was now very happy.

Thursday 11th March - Belén plain and Trujillo

The weather did not look too good but after breakfast we revisited the Belén plain. It was certainly cold but at our first stop we were entertained by three Great Spotted Cuckoos chasing each other and calling incessantly. We also had good views of a perched Woodlark, were surprised by an overflying Curlew and Kathy heard a Whimbrel.

Further into the plain we saw yet again Great and Little Bustards but little else except for six Griffon Vultures sitting in a field - we presumed because of the rain. We therefore returned to our hotel and dined on our enormous picnic lunches in the shelter of the covered terrace.

After lunch we braved the imminent rain and walked in to the town of Trujillo where we visited the castle and went our separate ways via various bars. Neville decided to visit a pond he had seen from the castle and what a good move - on his return we gathered up the people who had returned early from the town and went straight to this site. We saw Black-winged Stilts, two Little Ringed Plovers, two Black-tailed Godwits, 32 Little Grebes, 10 or more Water Pipits, Little Egrets, a Grey Heron, numerous Swallows with a few Sand and House Martins and a Red-rumped Swallow; what a find with the water level being just right for waders.

Friday 12th March - Monfragüe

Our last day - we first visited Neville's pond (actually a disused fishpond) and found all the previous day's birds for everyone. We then headed to the best spot in Extremadura, the Monfragüe National Park. Our first stop was at Peña Falcon watching the usual Griffon and Black Vultures plus really good views of Rock Bunting and also seeing Blue Rock Thrush, Firecrest (new for the holiday) plus other passerines. We also stopped at the old bridge, now exposed by the reduced water level, but apart from more vultures there was little else so we headed for a coffee stop, again at Villareal de San Carlos where they make the best coffee in the whole of Extremadura.

After visiting the information centre at Villareal de San Carlos we lunched at La Bascula, a wonderful viewpoint but didn't succeed with Spanish Imperial Eagle so we carried on to another favourite spot, the Tiétar cliffs. Here we did see two Spanish Imperial Eagles that everybody got a good look at as they sailed up and down the cliffs. We actually discussed identification as they were both immatures in somewhat drab plumage. One even had a radio transmitter on its back so must have been last year's bird.

We returned to base via a stop on the Río Almonte where we saw a Barn Owl, and then to the local Spar where we all bought some excellent Turon chocolate. The final list at the log totalled 116, a tremendous total for Extremadura and mainly because we had some serious birdwatchers on the holiday, excellent observers who were spotting everything. All in all an excellent holiday with splendid views of most of the region's specialities.

Acknowledgements

To all the party for being such jolly and cheerful participants and all good company to be with. To Kathy Archibald for 'doing' the flowers with a great deal of help from Margaret Silcocks. To Dale for his tremendous spotting ability and eyesight, especially for raptors, and finally to my co-leader for being - well ... Rob!!
Graham Hearl, RSPB/GOB Representative, Mallorca

Extremadura - 6 – 13 March 1999

Systematic Bird List

This early spring trip produced a total of 117 species which included good numbers of the region's specialities including **Great and Little Bustard, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse and Black Storks**. The number of **White Storks** had to be seen to be believed with nests perched on any conceivable vantage point. The raptors were excellent with 16 species recorded including the elusive **Black-shouldered Kite** and several **Imperial Eagles**. A pair of **Black Wheatears** at Peñafalcon was a good find and we were also rewarded with good numbers of **Azure-winged Magpies** and **Southern Grey Shrikes**. The order and nomenclature follows the "Birding World Complete List of The Birds of the Western Palearctic".

Little Grebe - *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

One on a small pond on the outskirts of Monfragüe national park on March 8th with two on another small pond just north of Cáceres on March 9th. A large flock of 32 were located on a series of ponds in Trujillo on March 10th and were still there on the following morning.

Great-crested Grebe - *Podiceps cristatus*

One was on the water below the Tiétar cliffs on March 12th.

Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Regularly recorded throughout the general area including 16 flying high to the south over the Belén plain on March 7th.

Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis*

This species was usually found in the Trujillo area with peak counts of 11 on March 8th, 10 on March 10th, 11 on March 11th and eight on March 12th.

Little Egret - *Egretta garzetta*

Small numbers were located in the Trujillo area although 11 were found on a series of ponds there on March 10th with 14 there on the 12th. Seven birds were on the Río Almonte by Venta la Barquilla on March 10th.

Grey Heron - *Ardea cinerea*

Up to two birds were found on the Belén plain, Monfragüe national park and Valdesalor throughout the period.

Black Stork - *Ciconia nigra*

This impressive species was located on the Belén plain on March 7th, 3 in Monfragüe national park on March 8th, two in the Monroy area on March 10th with one on the Río Almonte and a further three at Monfragüe on March 12th.

White Stork - *Ciconia ciconia*

This area of Extremadura must be one of the strongholds of this species in Western Europe with birds nesting in every conceivable place in trees or on buildings. Several nests were found in the middle of Trujillo.

Gadwall - *Anas strepera*

The only sighting involved two on a small pond north of Cáceres on March 9th.

Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos*

Small numbers were recorded on the small ponds dotted across the landscape in this area of Extremadura.

Teal - *Anas crecca*

Three males were located on a small livestock pond in the Monroy area on March 10th.

Black-shouldered Kite - *Elanus caeruleus*

This superb, delicate bird of prey was located from three sites with the first perched on a telegraph pole just to the west of Trujillo on March 9th. Another was seen briefly on the Trujillo - Monroy road on March 10th followed by a superb bird in display flight just north of Monroy later in the day.

Black Kite - *Milvus migrans*

The first sightings were one over the Trujillo - Monfragüe road and one at the Tiétar cliffs on March 8th followed by regular sightings throughout the area for the rest of the period.

Red Kite - *Milvus milvus*

Common throughout this area of Extremadura although usually seen at lower levels over the plains and dehesas.

Egyptian Vulture - *Neophron percnopterus*

Relatively common throughout the area with peak counts of six at Monfragüe on March 8th with eight there on March 12th.

Griffon Vulture - *Gyps fulvus*

Another raptor species with a strong population and birds recorded throughout the area. Peak counts included 100+ at Monfragüe national park on March 8th and March 12th.

Black Vulture - *Aegypius monachus*

This magnificent vulture was located in several areas with four on the Belén plain on March 7th, five at Monfragüe on March 8th, two north of Cáceres on March 9th, ten in the Monroy area on March 10th and several more at Monfragüe on March 12th.

Short-toed Eagle - *Circaetus gallicus*

Without doubt the most common and widespread eagle in the region at this time of year with birds recorded from all areas and peak counts of six in the Monfragüe region on March 8th and March 12th.

Hen Harrier - *Circaetus cyaneus*

A male and female were on the Belén plain on March 7th, two birds were located on the plains at Valdesalor on March 9th with two birds north-west of Cáceres, also on the 9th.

Montagu's Harrier - *Circus pygargus*

A male and female were hunting the plains north-east of Cáceres in company with hen harriers on March 9th.

Sparrowhawk - *Accipiter nisus*

One was soaring at Monfragüe national park on March 8th and another was found at the Río Almonte at Venta la Barquilla on March 10th.

Buzzard - *Buteo buteo*

Probably the most widespread and common bird of prey in this area of Extremadura with records from all areas but particularly in the dehesas.

Spanish Imperial Eagle - *Aquila adalberti*

A superb adult bird was located soaring at the Tiétar cliffs, Monfragüe on March 8th before four birds were found at the Tiétar cliffs on March 12th. The latter record all seemed to involve immature birds.

Golden Eagle - *Aquila chrysaetos*

This scarce and elusive raptor was located at Monfragüe national park on March 8th and over Peñafalcon at Monfragüe on March 12th.

Lesser Kestrel - *Falco naumanni*

This species has declined drastically in southern Europe over recent years but still maintains a stronghold in this area of Extremadura. There was a strong population centred around the town of Trujillo and these birds were often seen hunting the surrounding plains. Also seen at Monfragüe, Valdesalor and the Monroy area.

Kestrel - *Falco tinnunculus*

Small numbers were recorded from all areas in this area although it is probably less numerous here than the Lesser Kestrel.

Peregrine Falcon - *Falco peregrinus*

Only located at the very highest level within Monfragüe national park with two soaring over Castillo Monfragüe on March 8th and two at the Tiétar cliffs on March 12th.



Red-legged Partridge - *Alectoris rufa*

Widespread and relatively common across the plains and dehesas with a peak count of 10 north-west of Cáceres on March 9th.

Moorhen - *Gallinula chloropus*

Two were located on a livestock pond near Torrejon el Rubio on March 10th.

Coot - *Fulica atra*

A lone individual was on a small pond alongside the Trujillo to Monfragüe road on March 8th.

Crane - *Grus grus*

This wintering species usually leaves Extremadura in February so it was something of a surprise to see nine birds flying high over Monfragüe on March 8th.

Little Bustard - *Tetrax tetrax*

This area speciality was found throughout the region with 71 on the Belén plain on March 7th, 14 on the plains at Valdesalor on March 9th, 70 birds in the Monroy area on March 10th and 14 on the Belén plain on March 11th.

Great Bustard - *Otis tarda*

This magnificent species was located on the plains of Extremadura with 26 on the Belén plain on March 7th, two at Valdesalor and 25 to the north-west of Cáceres on March 9th & 10 on the Belén plain on March 11th.

Black-winged Stilt - *Himantopus himantopus*

A series of small ponds at Trujillo held nine birds in the evening on March 11th with eight birds there on the following morning.

Little ringed Plover - *Charadrius dubius*

This wader was unexpectedly scarce in the area with just two on a series of small ponds at Trujillo on March 11th with one there on March 12th.

Golden Plover - *Pluvialis apricaria*

Very much a plains species and a winter visitor to this area with 40 seen on the Belén plain on March 7th and 40 at Valdesalor on March 9th.

Lapwing - *Vanellus vanellus*

Relatively common and widespread across this region and an estimated peak count of 200 on the Belén plain on March 7th.

Snipe - *Gallinago gallinago*

Individual birds were recorded at the Río Almonte at Jaraisejo on March 7th, at a livestock pond on the Trujillo to Monroy road on March 10th and one at Trujillo on March 12th.

Black-tailed Godwit - *Limosa limosa*

Three birds were located in the evening of March 11th on a series of small ponds at Trujillo and were also found there the following morning.

Whimbrel - *Numenius phaeopus*

The only record involved one flying high over the Belén plain on March 11th.

Curlew - *Numenius arquata*

The only record involved two birds on the Belén plain on March 11th.

Redshank - *Tringa totanus*

Two birds were located on a series of small ponds at Trujillo on March 12th.

Green Sandpiper - *Tringa ochropus*

Several migrants were seen in the region making use of the river valleys and livestock ponds with a peak count of three on the Belén plain on March 7th.

Lesser Black-backed Gull - *Larus fuscus*

One was at Valdesalor on March 9th followed by another individual on a series of ponds at Trujillo on March 11th & 12th.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse - *Pterocles orientalis*

Six of these superb local specialities were seen on the plain at Valdesalor on March 9th, including two which gave a stunning fly-past. A further two birds were then located in the Monroy area on March 10th.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse - *Pterocles alchata*

Two birds were seen briefly near the village of Belén on March 7th before superb views were had of a flock of 27 to the north-west of Cáceres on March 9th.

Rock Dove - *Columba livia*

Two birds at Valdesalor on March 9th looked to be pure stock although they were seen around a farmstead. Approximately 30 birds were located at Monfragüe national park on March 12th and most of these appeared to be pure. This species does tend to hybridise with feral pigeons thereby diluting their wild origins.

Woodpigeon - *Columba palumbus*

Widespread and common across the region but especially in Monfragüe national park where several hundred were seen on the two visits on March 7th & 12th.

Collared Dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*

The only sighting involved two birds at Valdesalor on March 9th.

Great-spotted Cuckoo - *Clamator glandarius*

This species was not recorded until March 9th when one was showing well at Valdesalor. Further sightings involved two on the Trujillo to Monroy road on March 10th, three on the Belén plain on March 11th and one alongside the Trujillo to Monfragüe road on March 12th.

Barn Owl - *Tyto alba*

One flushed from scrub on the hillside at the Río Almonte by Venta la Barquilla on March 12th.

Little Owl - *Athene noctua*

Several sightings involved five on the Belén plain on March 7th followed by one alongside the Trujillo to Monfragüe road on March 8th.

Swift - *Apus apus*

A late arrival was heralded by three birds around the Hotel las Cigüeñas at Trujillo at dusk on March 10th. This was followed by four over Trujillo on March 11th with one there on March 12th.

Pallid Swift - *Apus pallidus*

Three birds were seen over the Hotel las Cigüeñas at Trujillo in the late afternoon on March 11th followed by, possibly the same three birds, over a series of small ponds at Trujillo the following morning.

Kingfisher - *Alcedo atthis*

Two birds were along the river at the Río Almonte by Jaraisejo on March 7th followed by one at Monfragüe national park on March 8th and one at the entrance to the great plain at Valdesalor on March 9th.

Hoopoe - *Upupa epops*

This region of Extremadura must be one of the better places to this remarkably striking bird in Spain. It was recorded each day and from all areas with peak daily counts of 10+ on March 7th and 12 on March 12th. A pair were nest building opposite the Hotel las Cigüeñas.

Great spotted Woodpecker - *Dendrocopos major*

Three birds were seen or heard in Monfragüe national park on March 7th.

Calandra Lark - *Melanocorypha calandra*

This resident species has one of its European strongholds on the plains of Extremadura with large numbers seen and heard in full song at the Belén plain, Valdesalor, north of Cáceres and in the Monroy area from March 6th to the 13th.

Crested Lark - *Galerida cristata*

Widespread and common across the whole region. Recorded from all habitats and in great numbers.

Thekla Lark - *Galerida theklae*

This species closely resembles Crested Lark and great care must be taken on its identification. Four birds were studied closely on the Trujillo to Monroy road on March 10th and were found to be this species.

Woodlark - *Lullula arborea*

This amazing songster was one of the first birds recorded on the Belén plain on March 7th when its song could be heard drifting over the sparse terrain; at least two more birds were recorded throughout the rest of the day. Two more were located at Monfragüe national park on March 8th with another in song over the Belén plain on March 11th.

Skylark - *Alauda arvensis*

Rather scarce with just odd individuals recorded from the Belén plain on March 7th & 11th, Monroy on March 10th but at least three at Valdesalor on March 9th.

Sand Martin - *Riparia riparia*

The first individual was located at over a farm pond on the road to Monroy on March 10th followed by one over a series of small ponds at Trujillo on March 11th with three there on the following morning.

Crag Martin - *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Fairly common and widespread across this area of Extremadura with peak counts of five at the Río Almonte bridge at Jaraisejo on March 7th, seven north-west of Cáceres on March 9th and 10 over the river by Monroy on March 10th.

Swallow - *Hirundo rustica*

Recorded throughout the period from March 6th to 13th and from a wide variety of habitats.

Red-rumped Swallow - *Hirundo daurica*

Strangely absent until March 10th when one was seen briefly over the river at Monroy. This was followed by four over a series of ponds at Trujillo on March 11th and three at the Tiétar cliffs in Monfragüe national park on March 12th.

House Martin - *Delichon urbica*

Another hirundine to put in a late arrival with the first sightings being six at Monroy on March 10th followed by several birds at Trujillo on March 11th & 12th.

Meadow Pipit - *Anthus pratensis*

Widespread and common across the area and occasionally seen in large numbers with several hundred on the Belén plain on March 6th.

Water Pipit - *Anthus spinoletta*

This winter visitor was recorded on three dates with two by the river at the Río Almonte bridge at Jaraisejo on March 7th, four at Trujillo on March 11th with just one there on March 12th.

Grey Wagtail - *Motacilla cinerea*

Single individuals were at the Río Almonte bridge at Jaraisejo on March 7th, the Tiétar cliffs at Monfragüe on March 8th, in the Monroy area on March 10th and at Trujillo on March 11th & 12th.

White Wagtail - *Motacilla alba*

Widespread and common across the whole area and seen throughout the period from March 6th To 13th.

Wren - *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Two were heard at Peñafalcon in Monfragüe national park on March 8th and one was seen in full song there on March 12th.

Robin - *Erithacus rubecula*

Relatively common and recorded from the Belén plain on March 7th, Monfragüe national park on March 8th & 12th, Valdesalor on March 9th and Monroy on March 10th.

Black Redstart - *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Widespread and relatively common throughout the area and recorded from a wide range of habitats.

Stonechat - *Saxicola torquata*

Widespread and relatively common in this area of Extremadura and recorded from a wide range of habitats.

Black Wheatear - *Oenanthe leucura*

A scarce species in this area. Was located at Peñafalcon in Monfragüe national park on March 8th; a male was alongside the water's edge and was then joined by a female.

Blue Rock Thrush - *Monticola solitarius*

Six birds at Monfragüe national park on March 8th included at least four at Peñafalcon then a male near Monroy on March 10th, another male on the Belén plain on March 11th and a minimum of three at Monfragüe on March 12th.

Blackbird - *Turdus merula*

Widespread and common and recorded from all habitats.

Song Thrush - *Turdus philomelos*

Occasional sightings of individual birds were made at the Belén plain, Monfragüe national park, Valdesalor and Monroy from March 6th to 13th.

Mistle Thrush - *Turdus viscivorus*

Two by the Río Almonte bridge on March 7th were followed by one at Monroy on March 10th and two at Monfragüe national park on March 12th.

Cetti's Warbler - *Cettia cetti*

This resident warbler was particularly difficult to find with just two on the Trujillo to Monroy road on March 10th and one at Monfragüe national park on March 12th.

Fan-tailed Warbler - *Cisticola juncidis*

Three birds were located on the Belén plain on March 7th followed by two at Valdesalor on March 9th, one on the Trujillo to Monroy road on March 10th and one on the Belén plain on March 11th.

Dartford Warbler - *Sylvia undata*

One was showing well in the scrub below Castillo de Monfragüe on March 8th and two were located in the Monroy area on March 10th.

Subalpine Warbler - *Sylvia cantillans*

Two birds were located in thick scrub at the Mirador La Basula in the Monfragüe national park on March 8th but were extremely difficult to see.

Sardinian Warbler - *Sylvia melanocephala*

Although a resident species this bird can be difficult to locate although six were found in Monfragüe national park on March 8th. Further sightings were made in the Monroy area on March 10th, the Belén plain on March 11th and Monfragüe on March 12th.

Blackcap - *Sylvia atricapilla*

One in Monfragüe national park on March 8th was followed by another at the same locality on March 12th.

Chiffchaff - *Phylloscopus collybita*

Widespread and common throughout the area.

Firecrest - *Regulus ignicapillus*

The only sighting involved one at Peñafalcon in Monfragüe national park on March 12th.

Long-tailed Tit - *Aegithalos caudatus*

One at Monfragüe national park on March 8th was the only sighting during the period.

Blue Tit - *Parus caeruleus*

Relatively common and widespread with records from the Belén plain, Monfragüe national park and the Monroy area.

Great Tit - *Parus major*

Relatively common and widespread with records from the Belén plain, Monfragüe national park and the Monroy area.

Short-toed Treecreeper - *Certhia brachydactyla*

This southern European speciality was located in a dead tree at Peñafalcon in Monfragüe national park on March 8th.

Southern Grey Shrike - *Lanius meridionalis*

Common and widespread with records from all areas and habitats and peak daily counts of 20 on March 9th and 15 on March 10th.

Woodchat Shrike - *Lanius senator*

Very scarce in the cold conditions with just one at Trujillo on March 7th and another on the Belén plain later in the day.

Jay - *Garrulus glandarius*

Monfragüe national park provided the only records with one there on March 8th and three on May 12th.

Azure-winged Magpie - *Cyanopica cyana*

Widespread and common throughout the dehesas although can be rather difficult to see well. Peak daily counts involved 20+ on March 7th and 40 on March 9th.

Magpie - *Pica pica*

Widespread and common and recorded from all habitats.

Chough - *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

This species was particularly scarce with just two at Castillo de Monfragüe on March 8th and two at Monfragüe national park on March 12th.

Jackdaw - *Corvus monedula*

Relatively widespread and common across the whole area and in all habitats.

Carrion Crow - *Corvus corone*

Somewhat scarce with just occasional birds recorded from the Belén plain on March 7th, Valdesalor on March 9th and Monfragüe national park on March 12th.

Raven - *Corvus corax*

This resident member of the crow family was recorded on a daily basis and from all areas with peak daily counts of four on the Belén plain on March 7th and seven in the Monroy area on March 12th.

Spotless Starling - *Sturnus unicolor*

Widespread and common throughout the Extremadura area and a large roost was located at Madrid airport on March 6th.

House Sparrow - *Passer domesticus*

Extremely common and widespread throughout the region with records from all areas and habitats. A large roost of several hundred birds was located at the Hotel las Cigüeñas at Trujillo.

Spanish Sparrow - *Passer hispaniolensis*

This species certainly appears to have its Spanish stronghold in this region of Extremadura with several large flocks recorded. Peak counts included a minimum of 300 birds on the Belén plain on March 7th and an amazing 1500 at a farmstead on the Trujillo to Monroy road on March 10th

Rock Sparrow - *Petronia petronia*

The only record involved seven birds at a farmstead just south of Monroy on March 10th.

Common Waxbill - *Estrilda astrild*

This species was originally introduced into eastern Portugal from South Africa and seems to have spread into this region of Extremadura with approximately 60 located at Valdesalor on March 9th.

Chaffinch - *Fringilla coelebs*

Widespread and common being recorded from all areas and habitats.

Serín - *Serinus serinus*

Widespread and common being recorded from all areas and habitats.

Greenfinch - *Carduelis chloris*

One was at Villareal de San Carlos on March 8th followed by occasional individuals in the Monroy area on March 10th, the Belén plain on March 11th and Monfragüe on March 12th.

Goldfinch - *Carduelis carduelis*

Widespread and common being recorded from all areas and habitats.

Linnet - *Carduelis cannabina*

Widespread and relatively common and recorded from most lowland habitats with a peak count of 100+ on the Belén plain on March 7th.

Bullfinch - *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

The only sighting involved a pair at Monfragüe national park on March 8th.

Hawfinch - *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

This elusive species was located on two occasions with two birds at Monfragüe national park on March 8th and one by the Río Almonte just south of Monroy on March 10th.

Cirl Bunting - *Emberiza cirlus*

Although very local in the UK this species is still widespread in southern Europe and records involved a pair under the bridge over the Río Almonte at Jaraisejo on March 7th, a singing male at Peñafalcon in Monfragüe national park on March 8th and three at Monfragüe on March 12th.

Rock Bunting - *Emberiza cia*

Two sightings involved one at Peñafalcon in Monfragüe national park on March 8th followed by two there on March 12th.

Corn Bunting - *Miliaria calandra*

Widespread and common particularly on the plains and among the dehesas.

BUTTERFLIES

Spanish Festoon
Small White
Western Dappled White
Clouded Yellow
Small Copper
Holly Blue
Brown Argus
Peacock
Wall Brown
Small Heath

MAMMALS, AMPHIBIANS, REPTILES

Red deer
Hare
Fox - heard only
Otter - spraint found

Marsh frog

Stripe-necked Terrapin
Iberian Wall Lizard

Rob Macklin, April 1999.

FLOWER HIGHLIGHTS (contributed by Kathy Archibald)

Sunday 7 March – Belén plain

Silene colorata just coming out. Lots of *Cytisus multiflorus*.

Lots of mossy stonecrop and water crowfoot at the bridge at Río Almonte, Jaraisejo.

Monday 8 March – Monfragüe

Meadow clary in flower at Castillo de Monfragüe, and rustyback fern, wood sage and henbit deadnettle here. Lots of tree heath in flower on the hillsides. Several hoop petticoat daffodils in flower plus angel's tears, all near Tiétar cliffs. *Adenocarpus hispanicus* on the cliffs at Peñafalcon.

Tuesday 9 March – Valdesalor

Barbary nut and sand crocus. Also yellow vetch (*Vicia lutea*) and sainfoin.

Wednesday 10 March – Monroy

Mainly at Río Almonte were narrow-leaved lupin, common jonquil, sand crocus, common fumitory, barbary nut and rosemary.

Thursday 11 March – Belén plain and Trujillo

White henbane on the plain.

Friday 12 March – Monfragüe

Lovely patches of common jonquil at Río Almonte which was very sweet-smelling and much-photographed. Barbary nut also here.