

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX

Telephone: 01603 300552

www.honeyguide.co.uk E-mail: chris@honeyguide.co.uk



Extremadura
16 – 24 March 2011

Participants

Val Codling
Malcolm and Helen Crowder
Richard King
Hilary MacBean

Morag McGrath
Pam Muirhead
Angela Steed
Alison Wilson

Bjørn and Ebba Nexø from Denmark, staying with Martin Kelsey, joined the group for two days.

Leaders

Martin Kelsey
Chris Durdin

Report by Martin Kelsey (most of it) and Chris Durdin (pre-breakfast and additions here and there).

Bird list by Martin, other lists by Chris.

All photos in this report were taken during the holiday,
those edged blue by Bjørn, green by Chris and brown by Helen.

Cover photo: Cabañas del Castillo (cabins of the castle) in the Villuercas mountains.

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

Martin Kelsey's blog about wildlife in Extremadura is on <http://birdingextremadura.blogspot.com>

See professional photographer Steve Fletcher's photos on www.extremaduraphotos.webs.com



As with all Honeyguide holidays, part of the price 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 £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust and a cash donation from Bjørn and Ebba Nexø.

During the holiday, Marcelino Cardalliaquet who runs SEO's Extremadura office, came to Finca Santa Marta to talk to the group and receive a total of €630/£548 on behalf of SEO. This year's donation brings the total given to SEO since the first Honeyguide holiday in Spain in 1991 to £12,856. The total for conservation contributions from all Honeyguide holidays was £69,841 by mid-April 2011.

**Extremadura
16 – 24 March 2011**

Itinerary

Wednesday 16th 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.

Thursday 17th March: Morning walk on hill above grounds of Finca Santa Marta and afternoon walk on heath above Madroñera.

Friday 18th March: Walk beside the river Ruercas near Madrigalejo, followed by a visit to the Crane Information Centre at Moheda Alta, picnic lunch and walk through the *dehesa* there. A brief stop en route back near Vegas Altas.

Saturday 19th March: Visit to heath at Jaraicejo and lunch at Miravete Pass. Afternoon walk beside Rio Tozo to the Tozo reservoir and a brief stop at the Bull Ring, Trujillo.

Sunday 20th March: Exploring plains around Santa Marta de Magasca.

Monday 21st March: From Trujillo to Torrejón El Rubío, 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 22nd March: Free morning in Trujillo, then east towards Villuercas mountains, with lunch by Almonte river near village of Cabañas del Castillo. Visit to village after lunch, with walk along base of cliffs.

Wednesday 23rd March: Arrocampo reservoir, between Almaráz and Saucedilla, lunch near Valdecañas, afternoon walk on Cerro de Almaráz.

Thursday 24th March: Early departure (6am) to Madrid to check-in at airport for flight back to UK.

Daily Diary

16th March: Madrid to Finca Santa Marta

The flight from Gatwick arrived at Madrid on time to rather cool, overcast weather. Once the paperwork was completed (very quick this year!) we loaded up the two minibuses and set off shortly after 2pm, taking the ring road around the southern side of Madrid before leaving it for the motorway south-west to Extremadura. We stopped just outside Madrid for lunch at the lively bar Las Esparteras, full of lunchtime business, where we enjoyed freshly prepared salads and absorbed the atmosphere of being in Spain. Onward on the journey with the impressive Gredos mountains to the north, their slopes covered by snow and cloud brushing their peaks.

As we approached Extremadura, the landscape was getting greener, the weather was getting brighter and more birds like white storks and black kites were being seen.

We reached the Finca at about 6.30, in time for tea to be organised and everyone to settle into their rooms before dinner.

17th March: Finca Santa Marta and Madroñera

About half the group gathered at 8 o'clock pre-breakfast, with the sun already emerging to take the edge off the night's chill. Hilary was quick to pick up on two hawfinches – more of these later today – and a hoopoe called repeatedly. We noted serins, blackcap and spotless starlings, among others, before moving along the Finca's entrance road. On a low wire, right by the buildings, was superb red-rumped swallow, its buff-coloured rump as near to red in the early morning sun as I recall seeing on this species. We admired the concentration of house sparrows in the storks' nest on the Finca, then on the dead eucalyptus trees down the road, though only found one good Spanish sparrow this morning. Two crested larks landed on the wall.

What a change a day makes with the weather! Today we enjoyed largely clear skies, plenty of sunshine and just light winds. After breakfast we enjoyed a very productive walk through the grounds of the Finca, in almond orchards and olive groves, up to a green path ascending the hill above the property. Swallows and red-rumped swallows hawked insects around the buildings as we set off. Within minutes of starting two short-toed eagles glided low overhead heading north, perhaps on migration, as shortly afterwards a third individual also drifted over in the same direction. Our slow pace was perfect for finding spring flowers, such as yellow star-of-Bethlehem and clumps of undulate anchusa. The weather was attractive to butterflies as well and we saw several western dappled whites and a very fine green hairstreak. Birds included several sightings of hawfinch and the sound of the Iberian race of green woodpecker coming from a valley below us. The green track afforded us fine views northward beyond Trujillo and up to the Gredos mountains, looking very clear, and it was difficult to believe that they were over a hundred kilometres away. Just off the path we found patches of conical orchid and champagne orchid in flower, while beside the path itself there were several Iberian fritillaries, close to flowering.

Back at the Finca we had our sandwich lunch and then drove a few kilometres to our afternoon spot, a French lavender and white broom heath above the small town of Madroñera. Thekla larks sang from the top of small holm oak bushes and from above, as did a woodlark, with possibly one of the most beautiful songs of all. There were carpets of hoop petticoat narcissus in flower, as well as many sand crocuses. Another short-toed eagle drifted over, as did parties of red kite, black kite and vultures. But pride of place was a Provence hairstreak which gave most of us wonderful views as it rested on the path in front of us.



Walking among hoop petticoats and sand crocuses and finding Provence hairstreak.

We were back just after 5pm for afternoon tea and the checklist, which was accompanied by the weak song of a hawfinch which obligingly sat perched on the almond tree in the car park - clearly visible from the sitting room. Later, a pre-dinner drinks reception was organised by our host Henri in his beautiful vaulted sitting room.

18th March: River Ruercas, Moheda Alta and Vegas Altas

There was another good view of a hawfinch pre-breakfast down the track in the direction of Lagar del Estudiantes, where we also admired the old chapel building.

Today we were joined by Bjørn and Ebba from Denmark. It was a fine and sunny morning as we left the Finca but as we approached our planned first stop, the Sierra Brava reservoir to the south of Zorita, we enter a dense fog bank where visibility was very poor. There was little point in attempting to bird watch at the reservoir so we switched plans and descended to the rice fields around the town of Madrigalejo. A male hen harrier passed by, with a female and a male marsh harrier seen just minutes afterwards. We stopped by the river Ruercas and, with far better visibility now, enjoyed a walk alongside the riverine woodland and beside a field of maize stubble. This had attracted feeding flocks of finches, mainly linnets, but also mixed parties of common waxbills and red avadavats, both of which afforded us good, prolonged views as they perched on brambles and dead vegetation nearby. Overhead, a migrating flock of 35 black kites drifted north. It is always wonderful to see migration actually happening. A lizard – a large psammodromus - basked in the sun and Cetti's warblers sang from the bankside vegetation.

After coffee in the village of Obando, we called in to visit the Crane Information Centre at Moheda Alta. There we had a tour of the exhibition about the wintering cranes and the ecology of the *dehesa*, with Martin translating manager Anabel's information. The area supports about 30,000 cranes in the winter, the largest concentration in Extremadura.

We had a picnic amongst the holm oaks, amidst a carpet of early spring flowers: sand crocuses, wild clary, and a mass of Barbary nut iris, which opened in glorious fashion as the afternoon progressed. As we walked through the woodland there were constantly things to take in: from the overall beauty of the landscape, to the sound of the newly arrived cuckoo, a pair of black storks passing overhead, to butterflies such as the Spanish festoon, sawfly orchids, common tree frogs and woodchat shrikes. The walk culminated in a tower hide, from which we could look across fields of rice stubble, haunt in the winter for thousands of cranes and geese, the vast majority having left about three weeks ago. But we did find a total of six common cranes in view from the hide including what appeared to be a family party of four, with a juvenile sadly injured.



Private hunting reserve – for woodchat shrikes?



Great bustards at Vegas Altas.

We returned towards the Finca, stopping just once when Angela spotted a small group of nearby great bustards. A fitting finale to the day, at quite close quarters we watched the birds, which then flew off to join another group. We were able to watch the two groups come together and then with great fortune, saw two of the males initiate full display. It had been a thoroughly rewarding and satisfying day, taking in a good spread of natural history interests, in true Honeyguide style!

19th March: Jaraicejo, Miravete Pass and Rio Tozo

The regular morning crew, now starting routinely at 7:45, walked beyond the storks at the Finca's entrance, turning right and heading a short way south on the old road. This led to a superb viewpoint in the direction of where we'd been yesterday, by a Judas tree with its first few pink buds just bursting. Most striking was how many winter visitors were still here, and continued to be all week: blackcaps, robin and song thrushes, with only the first couple of days' black redstarts now departed.

It was another beautifully clear day with just the lightest of breezes, so it became quite warm later. We headed north-east, past the town of Jaraicejo to explore an area of lavender and broom 'heathland'. As soon as we had stopped we heard the song of Dartford warbler and it was not long before we had found one singing on top of a broom bush. During the course of the walk we located six or seven different singing birds, some performing song flights, others singing from the top of bushes near the path. They were accompanied by a backing of corn bunting and Thekla lark song, as well as a constant humming of bees. Black and griffon vultures drifted overhead, effortlessly, sometimes grouping in spirals on a thermal.

As we dropped from the heath into an enchanting cork oak woodland an adult golden eagle entered the scene, coming in quite low before ascending to join the circling vultures. Gum cistus was starting to flower and butterflies such as small heath, swallowtail and Cleopatra flew across the path. In the cork oak the dominant sound was that of nuthatch but a male lesser spotted woodpecker also arrived on the scene, affording us excellent views.

After a coffee break nearby, we repaired to the Miravete Pass for our picnic. The views to the north especially were outstanding, the Tiétar valley lying below us, the reservoir of Arrocampo with the impressive backdrop of the snowy Sierra de los Gredos. A cirr bunting was found at the pass, crested tits were heard and alpine swifts passed high overhead.

We then descended to the Tozo valley, just ten kilometres from Trujillo, where we enjoyed a very productive afternoon walk beside the river, culminating in views across the small Tozo reservoir. The river was the haunt of pond terrapins, kingfishers and mallard, and we also found a small viperine snake. Above the *dehesa* there were wheeling black kites, with a pair of short-toed eagles displaying, as well as vultures and buzzards. The Tozo reservoir had an impressive variety of species: spoonbill, great white egret, five species of duck, four species of wader, as well as providing a picturesque setting. Hoop petticoat narcissus grew between the rocky outcrops near the river and we found a stripeless tree frog in the grass.

Martin and Richard went on an unsuccessful search for a pharmacy; best guess it was the sheer volume of pollen from white Spanish broom that was the culprit for irritable eyes. This allowed a short stop at the bullring in Trujillo, where perhaps a dozen lesser kestrels were present and a pale-phase booted eagle – just arrived in Extremadura – was seen passing overhead.

Steve and Karen Fletcher arrived in the evening to share both a meal at the Finca and some of Steve's wonderful photos of the birds of Extremadura.

20th March: Santa Marta de Magasca

The early birders simply stood in the Finca's orchard, enjoying the early morning sunshine, a hoopoe in a tree, hawfinch again and our first crag martin. Over breakfast, Henri briefed us on the recent UN resolution and the start of air action over Gaddafi's Libya.

After breakfast, with Bjørn and Ebba with us again, we drove west of Trujillo, pausing briefly to visit the pharmacy now known to be on duty, then towards the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. The warm, clear, settled weather continued today...to the point that we were keen to find shade for our picnic lunch! We stopped at the edge of open plains, where a black vulture was found standing in a field close to the road, proving excellent views and demonstrating its sheer size. A male little bustard was found partly concealed in last year's growth of thistles but its diagnostic black and white neck pattern showed well. A second bird was partially visible nearby. Lark song was everywhere, and indeed was a constant backdrop for the whole day. At this point there were Thekla and crested larks present, with a few more distant calandra larks.

A little bit further along the road we stopped at a high point overlooking a flower-rich meadow. There we had much closer views of calandras with their highly mimetic song and distinctive appearance. We did not have to wait long before we heard and then saw flying pin-tailed sandgrouse, their rapid flight and pointed wings giving them a rather wader-like appearance. Two landed on the ground, where they had a much more pigeon-like demeanour with their short legs and small heads. From the same spot we found a woodchat shrike and a migrant northern wheatear.

We then walked along a dirt track, the group straggling out a bit as some resolutely sorted out the identification of a Jersey buttercup, new to the Honeyguide Extremadura list. The advance party had brief flight views of several black-bellied sandgrouse, and was amused by the antics of a young calf showing great curiosity in a yellow wagtail. Occasionally griffon or black vultures drifted low overhead. A small pool held six black-winged stilts and a few mallards, as well as two grey herons. In damper areas beside the track hoop petticoat narcissi were in flower.

After coffee in Santa Marta de Magasca we stopped beside the river Magasca for lunch, appreciating the shade of bankside trees. As well as a few vultures and kites, we also saw a short-toed eagle and had fleeting views of a kingfisher. A clump of yellow toadflax grew close to where we parked. We then stopped on some high ground to admire an expansive panoramic view with the Gredos mountains to the north, while at our feet we found several sawfly orchids in full bloom. A large flock of goldfinches foraged on dead thistle heads while the omnipresent calandra lark sang above. Just as we were leaving a fine male Montagu's Harrier drifted across the road and then quartered the fields below us. Further along the road we had quick views of a little owl perched on a stone wall.

We concluded the afternoon with a very pleasant foray into the exposed granite outcrop terrain (Los Berrocales) that surrounds Trujillo. Among the massive weathered boulders on flat patches of ground we found great spreads of common storksbill, clumps of a spiked star-of-Bethlehem, more yellow toadflax and Spanish bluebells. It was a great area for black kites and we heard a great spotted cuckoo but sadly did not see it.



Left – open plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, with the snow-capped Gredos mountains on the horizon; and right – granite outcrop terrain with pink storksbill, white broom and the hilltop town of Trujillo in the background.

Later, with the Finca's staff enjoying a well-earned Sunday rest, we repaired to Trujillo (with some of us seeing an eagle owl drift over the road and another one perched on a telegraph post) to see the magnificent town square at night, with its imposing equestrian statue of Trujillo-born Francisco Pizarro and many fine examples of 16th century Renaissance architecture, and to enjoy the ambience and good hearty fare provided at La Troya restaurant where we were served a variety of local specialities, simple and very tasty. It was a memorable and thoroughly enjoyable evening during which Roger and Gillian Holt, Honeyguiders who were staying in Trujillo, popped in to see Chris and meet the group.

21st March: Monfragüe National Park

Before breakfast, a hoopoe was seen dust bathing and attacking a blackbird under an ivy-clad building in the garden. A woodchat shrike in the orchard was mobbed by blue and great tits.

It was another clear and sunny day, although there was a noticeably fresher breeze from the east. We headed north from Trujillo to the 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 passed the Tajo river. While driving, a few of us saw a Spanish imperial eagle fly past at quite low altitude but it was not a safe place to stop for long.

Our first stop was the castle itself, which we reached by climbing steep stone steps through groves of wild olive and cork oak. The view from the top was stunning: a vast *dehesa* panorama to the south, to the north the hills of the park, the man-made lakes along the river valley, and behind, the snow-capped Gredos. From the escarpment we watched passing griffon vultures, and careful scanning with her telescope by Helen yielded a pair of Spanish imperial eagles. Despite the distance, their diagnostic white markings on the leading edge of the wing were easy to see. We also had superb views of a male blue rock thrush. The stone walls provided refuges for plants like rue-leaved saxifrage and rustyback fern.

Our next port of call was the famous Peña Falcón and Salto de Gitano (the Gypsy's leap). As soon as we had arrived it was difficult to decide what to look at: a Spanish imperial eagle soaring, a calling peregrine, black storks (including a pair on their nest) and Egyptian vultures, as well numerous griffon vultures. Add to that black vulture, red and black kites and booted eagle! Perhaps the best approach was to simply soak up what is one of the most spectacular sites for bird watching in Europe! Several nettle tree butterflies were also seen very well.



Peña Falcón - these black storks had nested on the north side of the rocky outcrop in the river.

The road then took us over a bridge crossing the river Tajo. We stopped at Villareal de San Carlos for coffee and to pick up leaflets from the Information Centre for the National Park, afterwards continuing through to Tajadilla, a lovely picnic spot just downstream from one of the dams along the course of the river Tiétar. It overlooked another rock face with nesting griffon vultures. Black kites were present as well and azure-winged magpies came down to take crumbs from the picnic tables. At one point a couple of red deer were found browsing just metres away amongst the cistus.

The wonderful visit concluded in memorable fashion at the Portilla del Tiétar. The viewpoint directed our gaze onto the strata of the cliffs opposite, supporting another colony of griffon vultures. The highlights here were a delightful female otter and her two kits playing in the shade beside the river, at one point while a pair of Spanish imperial eagles were soaring, calling and mobbing a griffon vulture. Black storks circled and wheeled in front of the cliff, while a subalpine warbler sang from the bank of tree heath and cistus. What a magnificent way to spend an hour, ending, as Hilary described it, her "best day's birdwatching ever".

22nd March: Trujillo and Cabañas del Castillo

A colder morning, and more of a brisk walk before breakfast, up to see the now flowering fritillaries. Many more orchids had come into flower over the last few days too. Two hawfinches sat nicely on the ground



Three crag martins find an ornate facade on which to preen in Trujillo's Plaza Mayor.



in the almond orchard on the way back, while two group members did a longer walk on a newly discovered circuit. With a freshening easterly wind but no rain it became sunnier as the day progressed. As we assembled at the vans after breakfast a male lesser spotted woodpecker arrived, calling in the almond tree above us. This was in the same tree that a hawfinch had sung from while we were doing the checklist a few days ago...what a tree!

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 the old part of the town which is dominated by 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 kestrels as well as pairs of pallid swifts, all noted as we wandered or had coffee in the main square, with crag martins and an alpine swift overhead.

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. Chris spotted a pair of black wheatears almost as soon as we had started eating, and minutes later a Bonelli's eagle glided overhead. Other birds in this beautiful spot included grey wagtail, a singing serin, griffon vultures and three black storks. Yellow toadflax and meadow saxifrage were in flower, as well as the very attractive yellow daisy *Prolongoa pectinata*.

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 a gap between the crags, which gives a magnificent view of the valley to the east. 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 as well as alpine swift. Juniper, lavender and dwarf sheep's-bit were found growing, and some distant common jonquils were spotted through the telescope. We returned to the Finca on a cross-country road through the *dehesa*, taking the opportunity to photograph free-range goats, cattle and Iberian pigs.



From left: Iberian fritillary, *Prolongoa pectinata*, dwarf sheep's bit.

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 Malcolm on behalf of Honeyguide as a contribution from the group to continue SEO's work.

23rd March: Arrocampo and Cerro de Almaráz

Another cooler morning and a pre-breakfast walk concentrating on bird song, the star of which was a woodlark, all while walking the roughly triangular circuit up to the stone pines then left down the track and left again back towards the entrance road.

There was a strong easterly wind today with always the threat of rain, which fortunately did not materialise until we were ready to return to the Finca at the end of the day. We visited the reservoir of Arrocampo, an expanse of water fringed by reed mace, lying between the towns of Almaráz and Saucedilla. At our first stop we quite quickly saw several purple herons in flight, as well as two delightful squacco herons, standing motionless out of the wind. Nearby was a flock of Spanish sparrows which also obliged with uncharacteristically prolonged views. After some initial brief glimpses of purple swamphen, we all eventually obtained superb views of one, perched right out in the open on the *Typha*. An osprey also appeared, holding itself stationary in the wind. We walked to a second hide, watching marsh harriers en route as well as more purple herons. The wind had not abated by the time we reached there but we did manage to see two northern wheatears.

We went to have coffee in a bar in the centre of Saucedilla, beside the old church, where we had brief views of lesser kestrel (which nest on the church) but most were out feeding out in the countryside. A lady from the Town Hall kindly opened the church for us to see inside. We concluded our visit with a final stop to view the reservoir from close to the main road. Here we could hear Savi's warblers singing and careful scanning by Hilary succeeded in locating one bird, which most of us managed to see, despite it

being very restless because of the wind. Some also saw a black-winged kite perched and then flying from across the reservoir. Two spoonbills were also seen. Grape hyacinth was coming into flower and we also found some sawfly orchids.

We drove past the dam at Valdecañas for lunch beside a bridge in a deep valley. Thankfully it was a sheltered spot and as well as hawfinches and griffon vultures we were able to do some quick botanising, finding kermes oak and gum mastic.

We completed the afternoon with a real highlight, a very pleasant foray onto part of the limestone hill nearby (Cerro de Almaráz) where we found several species of orchid: naked man, conical, yellow bee, mirror, champagne and hill – the last being an exciting new find for Honeyguide. It was difficult to know where to step, with yellow bee and mirror orchids forming an almost continuous carpet. A short-toed eagle sat on a nearby pylon during our entire stay. The first drops of rain fell as we reassembled for the trip back to the Finca, where we had our final afternoon tea and checklist call-over.



From left: naked man, yellow bee, mirror and hill orchids.

24th March: Finca Santa Marta to Madrid

As we set off at 06.00 for Madrid, an Iberian hare narrowly missed being run over as it sat on the main road illuminated by our headlights! We had quite a good run to the airport, apart from some congestion on the city ring-road, arriving in good time for the check-in and farewells.

Highlights of the week, as nominated by group members

Val: great bustards displaying; cattle egrets in flocks.

Ali: nuthatch and lesser spotted woodpecker in the cork oak and cirl bunting responding to recordings. The 'palace' with balconies – the Finca Santa Marta suite – shared with Angela. The orchid afternoon.

Morag: the dehesa scenery; great bustard; Dartford warbler; otters; Spanish festoon and nettle-tree butterflies.

Richard: otters and black stork display.

Angela: swallows and orange trees of the Finca.

Malcolm: Martin's explanation of how the traditional methods of agriculture were both sustainable and supported conservation; graceful Egyptian vultures.

Helen: finding and watching Spanish imperial eagles at Monfragüe; the carpets of orchids.

Pam: black bulls; storks' nests with sparrows sharing.

Hilary: the huge array of raptors in Monfragüe and the black storks at Peña Falcón; flying great bustards; nuthatch and lesser spotted woodpecker.

Martin: the range of birds at Peña Falcón being watched by the group, possible "only in Monfragüe", otters and Spanish imperial eagle at the same time.

Chris: hill orchid and the mass of Spanish white broom; birds at the Finca, especially hoopoes and cuckoo singing at the same time, hawfinches and red-rumped swallow; otters.

The warmth of the sun and the companionship of the group – by popular acclaim.

Systematic list – Birds

A summary of sightings contributed by the whole group at the daily “call-over”

Little Grebe	Pairs seen on several days, generally on small pools.
Great Crested Grebe	Four seen on Tozo reservoir on 19 th March and a pair at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Cormorant	Seen almost every day, including several parties in skeins, presumably leaving their local wintering quarters for colonies elsewhere.
Squacco Heron	A pair seen at close quarters at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Cattle Egret	Seen almost daily, with a large flock at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Little Egret	Singles seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
Great White Egret	One at Tozo reservoir on 19 th March.
Grey Heron	Seen every day.
Purple Heron	At least ten seen at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Black Stork	Two seen over Moheda Alta on 18 th March, several at Monfragüe on 21 st March and four or five in Villuercas mountains on 22 nd March.
White Stork	Common throughout the week, around towns and villages, as well as in the fields.
Spoonbill	Two at Tozo on 19 th March and two at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Gadwall	Seen on Tozo on 19 th March and Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Teal	Seen on Tozo reservoir on 19 th March.
Mallard	Seen almost daily.
Shoveler	Singles seen at Tozo and Arrocampo.
Common Pochard	One male at Tozo on 19 th March.
Black-shouldered Kite	One at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Black Kite	Double figures seen every day and a migrating party of about 35 seen over the rice fields on 18 th March.
Red Kite	Single figures seen every day (bar one), especially over <i>dehesa</i> and the plains.
Egyptian Vulture	One over the Finca on 17 th March, about six seen at Monfragüe and a pair seen at Cabañas del Castillo.
Griffon Vulture	Good numbers seen every day, especially at Monfragüe on 21 st March (over 100 seen).
Black Vulture	Seen daily, and double figures at Monfragüe.
Short-toed Eagle	Seen almost daily.
Marsh Harrier	Several on the rice fields on 18 th March and at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Hen Harrier	A male and female seen on rice fields on 18 th March.
Montagu's Harrier	A male on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March.
Sparrowhawk	A single seen at Monfragüe on 21 st March.
Common Buzzard	Seen daily.
Spanish Imperial Eagle	Five adults seen at Monfragüe on 21 st March.
Golden Eagle	An adult over the heath at Jaraicejo on 19 th March.
Bonelli's Eagle	An adult over Rio Almonte on 22 nd March.
Booted Eagle	Pale phase birds seen on three occasions during the week.
Osprey	One at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Lesser Kestrel	Seen almost daily.
Common Kestrel	Seen almost daily in single figures.
Merlin	One seen on journey down from Madrid on 16 th March.
Peregrine	Seen over Tozo on 19 th March and at Monfragüe on 21 st March.
Red-legged Partridge	Several sightings.
Water Rail	Heard at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Moorhen	Recorded on river Ruerkas (rice fields) and Arrocampo.
Purple Swamphen	At least five birds at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Coot	Present at the reservoir of Arrocampo.
Common Crane	A total of seven seen near Moheda Alta on 18 th March.
Little Bustard	Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March.
Great Bustard	14 near Vegas Altas on 18 th March.

Black-winged Stilt	Two on Tozo reservoir and six on pool near Santa Marta de Magasca.
Lapwing	Very few of this winter visitor still present: single figures at Moheda Alta. on 18 th March and Tozo on 19 th March.
Snipe	One at Tozo on 19 th March.
Greenshank	About four at Tozo on 19 th March.
Green Sandpiper	Five seen on Rio Ruercas on 18 th March and singles on Tozo and at Arrocampo.
Common Sandpiper	Single bird at Sierra Brava on 18 th March.
Black-headed Gull	Seen almost daily with about a thousand present at Moheda Alta on 18 th March.
Lesser Black-backed Gull	One on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca..
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	About ten near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March.
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	Two seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March.
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	Seen daily.
Woodpigeon	Small numbers seen daily.
Collared Dove	Seen daily.
Great Spotted Cuckoo	Just heard once, on afternoon of 20 th March.
Common Cuckoo	Recorded almost daily, especially near the Finca.
Scops Owl	Heard most evenings (and some mornings) at the Finca.
Eagle Owl	Two seen briefly on way to Trujillo on evening of 20 th March.
Little Owl	One seen briefly near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March.
Long-eared Owl	Heard during night of 20 th March from the Finca.
Pallid Swift	Seen almost daily over the Finca and at Trujillo.
Alpine Swift	Several over Miravete Pass on 19 th March; over Trujillo and at Cabañas del Castillo on 22 nd March.
Kingfisher	One on Tozo on 19 th March, also on Rio Magasca on 20 th March.
Hoopoe	Commonly seen every day.
Green Woodpecker	Heard at the Finca on 17 th and 18 th March.
Great Spotted Woodpecker	One at Miravete Pass on 19 th March.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Seen at Jaraicejo on 19 th March and subsequently almost every day at the Finca.
Calandra Lark	Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March.
Crested Lark	Common and seen daily.
Thekla Lark	Seen on heath above Madroñera, near Santa Marta de Magasca and Jaraicejo.
Woodlark	Heard and sometimes seen several times at the Finca and also at Moheda Alta, near Santa Marta de Magasca and Jaraicejo.
Skylark	One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March.
Sand Martin	Seen at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Crag Martin	Common near bridges and in rocky areas in Monfragüe, in the Villuercas mountains and also present in Trujillo.
Swallow	Common every day.
Red-rumped Swallow	Seen daily.
House Martin	Seen every day.
Meadow Pipit	Small numbers seen almost daily.
Yellow Wagtail	One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March.
Grey Wagtail	Two present on Rio Almonte on 22 nd March.
White Wagtail	Seen every day.
Wren	Recorded daily.
Robin	Recorded daily.
Black Redstart	Seen at Monfragüe and Cabañas del Castillo and almost daily near the Finca.
Stonechat	Seen almost every day.
Northern Wheatear	One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20 th March and two at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Black Wheatear	A pair at Rio Almonte on 22 nd March.
Blue Rock Thrush	Seen in Monfragüe and Cabañas del Castillo and heard at the Finca on 19 th March.
Blackbird	Seen daily.
Song Thrush	Seen at the Finca and elsewhere daily.

Mistle Thrush	Singles seen near Tozo, Santa Marta de Magasca and Valdecañas.
Cetti's Warbler	Present in rice fields and at Arrocampo.
Zitting Cisticola	Present on the rice fields, near Santa Marta de Magasca and at Arrocampo.
Savi's Warbler	At least two singing at Arrocampo on 23 rd March.
Dartford Warbler	Excellent views at Jaraicejo on 19 th March.
Subalpine Warbler	Singing at Monfragüe on 21 st March.
Sardinian Warbler	Seen almost daily.
Blackcap	Seen daily and in good numbers around the Finca.
Chiffchaff	Small numbers seen, generally close to water.
Long-tailed Tit	Recorded on just two days.
Blue Tit	Seen daily.
Great Tit	Seen daily.
Short-toed Treecreeper	Seen and heard almost daily, especially around the Finca.
Iberian Grey Shrike	Seen almost daily.
Woodchat Shrike	Seen almost daily.
Jay	One seen briefly near Cabañas del Castillo on 22 nd March.
Azure-winged Magpie	Common and seen every day.
Magpie	Common and seen every day.
Jackdaw	Common and seen every day.
Raven	Seen daily.
Spotless Starling	Common every day.
House Sparrow	Common every day.
Spanish Sparrow	Seen almost daily near the Finca, as well as on the rice fields, plains and at Arrocampo.
Tree Sparrow	Two or three at Moheda Alta on 18 th March.
Common Waxbill	Small flock on the rice fields on 18 th March.
Red Avadavat	Small flocks on the rice fields on 18 th March.
Chaffinch	Small numbers seen every day.
Serin	Seen every day, often in song-flight.
Greenfinch	Seen almost daily near the Finca.
Goldfinch	Small flocks seen daily.
Linnet	Seen almost daily.
Hawfinch	Recorded every day at the Finca, as well as at Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
Girl Bunting	One at Miravete Pass on 19 th March.
Corn Bunting	Seen daily. One of the commonest birds of the plains.

MAMMALS

Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Iberian hare <i>Lepus granatensis</i>
Wild boar <i>Sus scrofa</i> – rootings	Rabbit <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Red deer <i>Cervus elaphus hispanicus</i>	House mouse <i>Mus domesticus</i>
Western hedgehog <i>Erinaceus europaeus</i> (dead)	Iberian mole <i>Talpa occidentales</i> (hills)

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

European pond terrapin <i>Emys orbicularis</i>	Moorish gecko <i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>
Viperine snake <i>Natrix maura</i>	Stripeless tree frog <i>Hyla meridionalis</i>
Large psammodromus <i>Psammodromus algeris</i>	Tree frog <i>Hyla arborea</i>
Iberian wall lizard <i>Podarcis hispanica</i>	Iberian water frog <i>Rana perezi</i>

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail	Clouded Yellow	Wall Brown
Spanish Festoon	Cleopatra	Provence Hairstreak
Large White	Nettle-tree Butterfly	Green Hairstreak
Green-striped White	Large Tortoiseshell	Small Copper
Western Dappled White	Red Admiral	Holly Blue
Bath White	Painted Lady	Brown Argus
Brimstone	Small Heath	

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

A large pond skater, probably <i>Aquarius najas</i>	Hummingbird hawk-moth <i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i> (dead!)
Horned mantis <i>Empusa pennata</i> nymph	Pine processionary moth <i>Thaumetopoea pityocampa</i> tents
Egyptian grasshopper/locust <i>Anacridium aegyptium</i>	Caterpillars of the tiger moth <i>Ocnognyna boetica</i>
Mole cricket <i>Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa</i> (heard)	Violet carpenter bee <i>Xylocopa violacea</i>
Rhinoceros beetle <i>Copris lunaris</i>	Large ant possibly <i>Camponotus vagus</i>
7-spot ladybird <i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>	
Dor (dung) beetle <i>Geotrupes sp</i>	
Fire bug <i>Pyrrhocoris apterus</i>	

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.

Pinaceae		
<i>Pinus pinea</i>	Stone/umbrella pine	(3)
Cupressaceae		
<i>Juniperus communis</i>	Common juniper	(13)
Fagaceae		
<i>Quercus coccifera</i>	Kermes oak	(24)
<i>Quercus rotundifolia</i>	Holm oak	(26)
<i>Quercus suber</i>	Cork oak	(27)
Ulmaceae		
<i>Ulmus minor</i>	Elm sp.	(c. 38)
<i>Celtis australis</i>	Southern nettle-tree	(39)
Urticaceae		
<i>Urtica membranacea</i>	Membranous nettle	(49)
<i>U. urens</i>	Annual nettle	(-)
Caryophyllaceae		
<i>Paronychia capita</i>	Paronychia	(134)
<i>Spergularia arvensis</i>	Corn spurrey	(-)
<i>Spergularia purpurea</i>	Purple sand-spurrey	(148)
<i>Silene colorata</i>	Mediterranean campion sp.	(180)
Ranunculaceae		
<i>Ranunculus sp.</i>	Water crowfoot sp.	
<i>Ranunculus paludosus</i>	Jersey buttercup	(249)
Fumariaceae		
<i>Fumaria capreolata</i>	Ramping fumitory	(303)
Cruciferae		
<i>Matthiola lunata</i>	A stock (photo in Polunin)	
<i>Alyssum alyssoides</i>	Small alison	
<i>Sisymbrium altissimum</i>	Tall rocket (the abundant yellow crucifer in fields and on disturbed ground everywhere)	
<i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i>	Wild radish	(369)
<i>Teesdalia nudicaulis</i>	Shepherd's cress	

Crassulaceae		
<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort	(396)
Rosacea		
<i>Rosa canina</i>	Common dogrose	(c.404)
Saxifragaceae		
<i>Saxifraga tridactyla</i>	Rue-leaved saxifrage	
<i>Saxifraga granulata</i>	Meadow 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) NiF
<i>Cytisus multiflorus</i>	White broom	
<i>Cytisus</i> sp.	Broom, not identified to species level	
<i>Onobrychis humilis</i>	Not in Blamey or Polunin	
<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) NiF
<i>Psoralea bituminosa</i>	Pitch trefoil	(508)
<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 molle</i>	Dovesfoot cranesbill	(741)
<i>Geranium rotundifolium</i>	Round-leaved cranesbill	(743)
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	Cut-leaved cranesbill	(745)
<i>Geranium purpureum</i>	Little robin	(748)
<i>Geranium lucidum</i>	Shining cranesbill	(749)
<i>Erodium botrys</i>	Storksbill sp.	(758)
<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) NiF
Anacardiaceae		
<i>Pistacia lentiscus</i>	Mastic tree or lentisc	(865)
Violaceae		
<i>Viola (arvensis) kitaibeliana</i>	Dwarf pansy	(931)
Cistaceae		
<i>Cistus albidus</i>	Grey-leaved cistus (big pink flowers)	(961) NiF
<i>Cistus clusii</i>		(969)
<i>Cistus salviifolius</i>	Sage-leaved cistus (small white flowers)	(965) NiF
<i>Cistus ladanifer</i>	Gum cistus (big white flowers)	(971)

<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	Common rockrose	(996)
<i>Tuberaria guttata</i>	Spotted rockrose	(985)
Cactaceae		
<i>Opuntia maxima</i> (=ficus-indica)	Prickly pear	(1040)
Umbelliferae		
<i>Ferula communis</i>	Giant fennel	(1141)
<i>Smyrniium olustatrum</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 (white flowers)	(1178)
<i>Erica australis</i>	Spanish heath (pink flowers)	(1181)
Rubiaceae		
<i>Galium verticilliatum</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> ssp. <i>oleaster</i>	Wild olive	(1248a)
Boraginaceae		
<i>Buglossoides arvensis</i>	Corn gromwell	(1349)
<i>Nonea vesicaria</i>	A nonea	(1375)
<i>Anchusa undulata</i>	Undulate anchusa	(1406)
<i>Myosotis ramosissima</i>	Early forget-me-not	
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>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	Rosemary	(1526)
<i>Lavandula stoechas</i>	French lavender	(1528)
<i>Salvia verbenaca</i>	Wild clary	(1545)
<i>Stachys arvensis</i>	Field woundwort	
<i>Thymus camphorates</i> (?)	Camphor thyme	(Polunin, 1162e)
	NiF See note below.	
Solanaceae		
<i>Hyosciamus albus</i>	White henbane	(1555)
Scrophularicaea		
<i>Parentucellia latifolia</i>	A tiny, red bartsia type	(1652)
<i>Linaria amethystea</i>	'Amethyst' toadflax	(Polunin)
<i>Linaria spartea</i>	A yellow-flowered toadflax	(Polunin)
Caprifoliaceae		
<i>Lonicera caprifolium</i>	Perfoliate honeysuckle (Polunin etc)	NiF
<i>Viburnum tinus</i>	Laurestinus	(1711)
Valerianaceae		
<i>Valerianella</i> sp.	Unidentified cornsalad	

Campanulaceae

<i>Jasione crispa</i>	Dwarf sheep's bit (Polunin 1355c) 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>Galactites tomentosa</i>	Galactites	(1971) NiF
<i>Prolongoa pectinata</i>	A yellow daisy	(Polunin 1428e)
<i>Silybum marianum</i>	Milk thistle	(1982) NiF
<i>Cnicus benedictus</i>	Blessed thistle	(2011)

Liliaceae

<i>Asphodelus fistulosus</i>	Hollow-leaved asphodel (Madrid roadsides)	(2087)
<i>Asphodelus aestivus</i>	Common asphodel	(2089) NiF
<i>Gagea</i> sp. <i>pratensis</i> ?	Yellow star-of-Bethlehem sp.	(c 2106)
<i>Fritillaria lusitanica</i>	Iberian fritillary	(2152)
<i>Ornithogalum concinnum</i>	A spiked star-of-Bethlehem	(Polunin)
<i>Ornithogalum ? narbonense</i>	Star-of-Bethlehem sp.	(2171)
<i>Urginea maritima</i>	Sea squill (leaves, bulbs and dead flower spikes)	(2163)
<i>Hyacinthoides hispanica</i>	Spanish bluebell	(2191)
<i>Muscari comosum</i>	Tassel hyacinth	(2201)
<i>Muscari neglectum</i>	Grape hyacinth	(2206)
<i>Asparagus acutiflorus</i> ?	A shrubby asparagus	(c 2212)
<i>Narcissus triandrus papyraceus</i>	Angel's tears	(Polunin)
<i>Narcissus jonquilla</i>	Common jonquil	(2279)
<i>Narcissus bulbocodium</i>	Hoop-petticoat narcissus	(2281)

Iridaceae

<i>Gynandrisis sisyrinchium</i>	Barbary nut iris	(2305)
<i>Romulea bulbocodium</i>	A sand crocus	(2314)
<i>Romulea columnae</i>	Sand crocus	(2320)
<i>Arisarum simorrhinum</i>	A friar's cowl	(2378)

Orchidaceae

<i>Orchis (morio) champagneuxii</i>	Champagne orchid	(2403)
<i>Orchis conica</i>	Conical orchid	
<i>Orchis italica</i>	Naked man orchid	(2409)
<i>Orchis collina</i>	Hill orchid	(2413)
<i>Ophrys tenthredinifera</i>	Sawfly orchid	(2442)
<i>Ophrys lutea</i>	Yellow bee orchid	(2423)
<i>Ophrys speculum</i>	Mirror orchid	(2436)

Gramineae

<i>Lamarckia aurea</i>	Golden dog's-tail	(2459)
<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	Lesser reedmace	
<i>Arundo donax</i>	Giant reed	(2494)

FERNS (PTERIDOPHYTA)

<i>Cheilanthes pteridoides</i>	Scented cheilanthes	(2517)
<i>Ceterach officinarum</i>	Rusty-back fern	(2532)
<i>Polypodium</i> sp.	A polypody	

At the lunchspot near Cabañas del Castillo there were two small sub-shrubs that smelt strongly of camphor. They were not in flower but leaf shape and general impression were consistent with *Thymus camphorates*, Camphor thyme. This is not in Blamey/Grey-Wilson; Polunin notes that there are 31 species of thyme in the book's area, of which 24 are restricted to the Iberian peninsula in Europe. Polunin gives the distribution of *Thymus camphoratus* as S. Portugal.