



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
10 – 17 February 2015

Holiday participants

Paul Ingram and Jan Farmer
Mavis Pilbeam
Averil Monteath
Howard and Sue Bayliss

Leader

Chris Durdin

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

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

Report by Chris Durdin

Photos by Chris Durdin, group members (indicated by initials)
and Steve Fletcher (lesser spotted woodpecker on the cover)
all apart from the last taken during the holiday week.

Cover photos, clockwise from top left: angel's tears narcissi, lesser spotted woodpecker,
oranges at Santa Marta de Magasca, white stork on the Finca's bell tower.

Below: the group at dinner, with Renée and Laura from Finca Santa Marta (HB).
Our Europcar minibus in Honeyguide red with HWH (Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays) number plate:
coincidence or Top Gear moment?



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 £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust and topped up with some funds held in reserve.

Martin Kelsey, SEO volunteer and often Honeyguide leader in Extremadura, received our cheque for €500/£420 on behalf of SEO. This year's donation brings the total given to SEO since the first Honeyguide holiday in Spain in 1991 to £16,305. The total for conservation contributions from all Honeyguide holidays was £97,800 by February 2015.

Extremadura, 10 – 17 February 2015 Itinerary

Tuesday 10 February	Gatwick to Madrid by easyJet. To Trujillo via A5 and R5 motorways with stop for drink at Las Esparteras bar. Arrival at Finca Santa Marta for evening meal.
Wednesday 11 February	A walk at Finca Santa Marta; Alcollarín Reservoir and across the plain at Campo Lugar.
Thursday 12 February	Madroñera heath, Sierra Brava reservoir, coffee at Obando. Afternoon at the crane reserve of Moheda Alta, with lunch and walk in the <i>dehesa</i> , viewing from hide and observation tower and visit to exhibition centre.
Friday 13 February	Monfragüe National Park. Stop at castle and then opposite Peña Falcón crag. Coffee at Villareal de San Carlos followed by lunch at the Tajadilla picnic area. Then to Portilla del Tiétar. Stop in Trujillo on the return journey. Evening picture show by Steve Fletcher
Saturday 14 February	Morning in Trujillo, then lunch beside the River Tozo and a walk towards the Tozo reservoir. Free time back at Finca Santa Marta, then a gathering hosted by Henri before dinner.
Sunday 15 February	Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca. Dinner in La Troya restaurant in Trujillo.
Monday 16 February	North-east to heathland close to town of Jaraicejo leading to cork oak grove. Coffee at service station beside A5, followed by lunch at Miravete Pass. Afternoon walk beside Arrocampo reservoir.
Tuesday 17 February	Departure from Finca Santa Marta and return to Madrid airport for flight to Gatwick.

Daily diary

10 February: Gatwick to Finca Santa Marta

It was a smooth easyJet flight over the Pyrenees, apart from the crying infants, and we reached Madrid on time. The Europcar paperwork and loading up into our pillarbox red Mercedes Vito all proved equally straightforward and with Mavis's help, following Martin Kelsey's instructions, we found all the easiest roads around Madrid and headed west. Less than hour later we were stopping at the Las Esparteras bar beside the motorway for coffee/tea/freshly squeezed orange juice and *raciones* of crisps, peanuts and olives. It's no ordinary service station, with hanging hams and a remarkable wine selection to admire.

There were several red kites as we continued, driving with the Gredos Mountains to our right and towards the setting sun. A white stork was on a nest atop a raised tank. Otherwise the birds were generally unremarkable, at least until we'd passed the sign saying we were in Extremadura when a flight of some 30 cranes flew over the motorway, as if to welcome us to the region. Near Arrocampo Reservoir a great white egret flew past. The holm oak *dehesa* was soon fading into the twilight and it was dark by the time we turned off the main road at Trujillo and covered the last few miles south to Pago de San Clemente and Finca Santa Marta, arriving at 7:45. Laura was there to meet and greet and to settle us into our nicely warmed rooms. By 8:30 we were seated for our evening meal: cook Kathy came in for a chat so I knew already what to expect, namely cauliflower cheese, consommé, chicken curry and apple tart. The anecdotes, like the Finca's own red wine, were soon flowing.

11 February: Finca Santa Marta; Alcollarín Reservoir, Campo Lugar

Though there wasn't much light before our 8:30 breakfast, it's amazing what you can see in about 20 minutes. Hoopoes were calling and white storks bill-clapping around the Finca as four of us met up on one of the local tracks. A short-toed treecreeper sang persistently and showed briefly. A woodlark also sang and, while not the best of views, was seen for a time. Coming back to base, two hawfinches settled in the big almond tree in the car park and were soon joined by two more. Martin Kelsey arrived at breakfast-time with bird news and directions to the new Alcollarín Reservoir. He left with Honeyguide's cheque for SEO (see page 2), to be passed to local SEO officer Marcelino Cardalliaguet in the coming days.

After breakfast, as we gathered ready to walk, a loud double explosion shattered the peace: an aeroplane's engines told us we'd heard a sonic boom. We spent the morning in and around the Finca's grounds on a day that was mostly bright and a very comfortable temperature for February. Azure-winged magpies moved ahead of us as we walked through the grove of almonds and olives. Near the row of cork oaks were the distinctive leaves of friar's cowl, and after lifting a few leaves we were able to see a couple of the distinctive flowers. Other flowers included field marigolds, ramping fumitory and field woundwort. On the other side of the wall beyond the stone pines we looked down on San Clemente village, including the church with its white storks' nest. There was no luck here finding narcissus flowers, plainly not yet out, but a surprise as we completed the circuit was to find a couple of early sage-leaved cistus flowers.

Henbit deadnettle, honeysuckle *Lonicera implexa* and Bermuda buttercup were among other flowers already showing, and a couple of crag martins flew low over us. Returning to the Finca, some who weren't at that point in their rooms were lucky enough to see or hear a lesser spotted woodpecker in the big almond tree.



L to R: Wall pennywort (navelwort) growing in a cork oak's bark at the Finca; henbit deadnettle; friar's cowl *Arisarum simorrhinum*

It was my first visit to the new reservoir at Alcollarín, and what a great place it is – and very easy to enjoy. The first small car park was right by the dam wall, and immediately there were dozens of great crested grebes, lots of black-headed gulls and many hundreds of shovelers on the water. Close in there were noisy dabchicks and better still were three black-necked grebes: the one we had in the scope showed its fiercely red eyes. Crested larks foraged on the stony ground in front us, and other birds putting in an appearance included stonechats, black redstart, several chiffchaffs and the greenest of greenfinches. There was a constant movement of white wagtails over the water and two marsh harriers came past from opposite directions.

Moving round the reservoir edge, we spent most of our time near the weir that marks the start of the higher section, adjacent to handy picnic tables. Many little egrets were dwarfed by several great white egrets and one of the latter, on a concrete dam wall, was surrounded by any number of white wagtails. A kingfisher showed well both on a small wetland patch and the stones by the weir, with a common sandpiper not far away. Somewhere in between the birding we enjoyed a leisurely picnic. Jan found an Iberian grey shrike; a green sandpiper buzzed around and a single squacco heron was much less hidden than they often are. Sue was alert to spoonbills on a more distant shore.



Birdwatching at Alcollarín reservoir; great white egret and white wagtails.

We returned along the reservoir's side and drove over the dam wall and as far as the track allowed along the other side. On this side were heard then found wigeons, a dozen or so shelducks and couple of pintails, though the best sighting was probably a dense and mobile flock of Spanish sparrows. We returned across the dam where a swallow and a crag martin flew over us.

Following Martin's advice we then easily found a daytime roost of stone-curlews close to the edge of Campo Lugar village. Our count was nine, but no doubt there were others hidden amongst the thistles. Nearby was the 'zip... zip... zip' of a fan-tailed warbler or zitting cisticola. Continuing across the Campo Lugar steppe, we made various stops to listen and scan. Calandra larks, skylarks, ravens, perched corn buntings and buzzards were points of interest, but better still were fairly distant great bustards, two together and three in another nearby group. Water under a cattle grid by a grand stone entrance got us onto hands and knees, but there was no sign of the hoped-for spadefoot toads, just a winter webworm moth caterpillar rescued from drowning and restored close to many others feeding on sesamoides. We examined the tiny white and pink flowers of strapwort.

The best was yet to come: approaching the end of the road across the steppe, Howard was alert to three great bustards on a wide track on his side of the minibus. Despite our mobile hide they must have known they were being watched. They walked slowly and sedately away, eventually taking off and flying to a more respectable distance. We were then back on the homeward road through Zorita and to the Finca for tea and checklists.

After dinner the clear, cloudless sky encouraged Averil, Sue and Howard to join me in looking through the telescope at Jupiter, with three moons in a row, though it was too cold to linger.

12 February: heath near Madroñera, Sierra Brava reservoir and Moheda Alta

Remarkably, before breakfast on this frosty morning, there were two lesser spotted woodpeckers on view. While four of us were down the lane getting brilliant views of a drumming male, the others were watching another one in the car park area.



Corn bunting at Madroñera.

Having navigated through Madroñera, we were soon on a heath of broom and lavender. My usual walk across part of the heath seemed a less good idea than usual as behind the gates was a herd of cows: they were gentle-looking but all had horns that were a distinct deterrent from that route. It didn't matter: right by where we parked almost immediately there were Dartford warblers singing and perched atop bushes. On a wire in the middle distance was a woodlark

and we were lucky soon to have a Thekla lark in song low overhead before it perched on a fence post. Curiously, everyone in this group was very familiar with Dartford warblers but less familiar with the Sardinian warbler and plentiful buntings that we also saw well, along with stonechats and both species of magpies.

Heading south, we took the smallest of detours to overlook Sierra Brava reservoir. As expected, with its harder edges and the competition of the newer reservoir at Alcollarín, there wasn't a great deal to detain us. At the first point, annual daisies and the webs and caterpillars of winter webworm moths were more admired than the huge but distant flocks of shovelers. At the second point, looking south away from the reservoir towards the rice fields, we could see and hear many cranes.

After coffee in the nice hotel at Obando, we drove to the picnic area at Moheda Alta. By now it was warm and white butterflies were on the wing: Portuguese dappled whites, having netted and examined one of them. Jan found a black-shouldered kite in the more open area near to the visitor centre, but it didn't hang around long enough for everyone to see it. The small, pale flowers of sand crocus were poking out of barer bits of ground where you looked hard enough. But all these were really the supporting cast. We'd seen many cranes in the fields and *dehesa* as we'd approached Moheda Alta, but here there were many more, spread through the open wood pasture adjacent to where we picnicked. They were alert to us, of course, and gently walked away, or took short flights to add more distance between themselves and us. All the time they called, an evocative background noise that stayed with us for much of the afternoon.



Cranes, and crane footprints in a puddle.

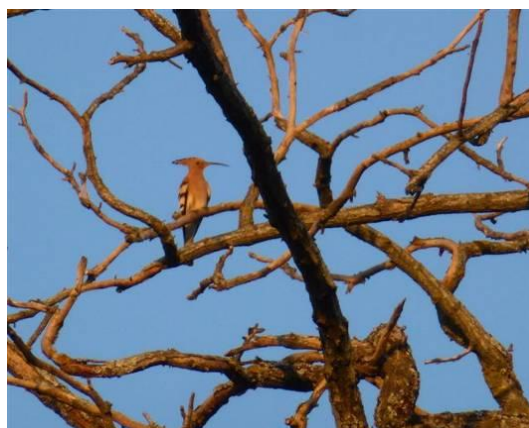
We then walked through the *dehesa*, along the way seeing woodlark, corn buntings and many chiffchaffs. Near the new hide, which overlooks adjacent paddyfields, there were Spanish sparrows and an Iberian grey shrike. Averil was quick to call out a black stork that flew away from us. From the hide there were cranes, egrets and herons: it didn't add a great deal bird-wise but it was nice to sit for a while. By now the weather was almost hot and those who'd shed layers and left them in the minibus were grateful. Mavis found a frog with a clear green stripe down its back, an Iberian water frog.

Back at the minibus the picnic area was full of families enjoying the warm sunshine in the late afternoon. We called in at the visitor centre, met Anabel there and briefly admired the models and displays. Heading back, we made partly successful attempts to photograph cranes on paddyfields along the route.

After tea and checklists back at the ranch, Laura took some of us on a quick tour of Finca Santa Marta, including the communal areas and rarely used private chapel. With the help of the guitar Laura had rustled up, a modest musical diversion followed the usual delicious four-course meal.

13 February: Monfragüe National Park

Just a touch of frost this morning as four of us walked to the Casa del Estudiante as first light was breaking. We enjoyed a superb 'Extremadura moment': a female¹ lesser spotted woodpecker was drumming on a dead branch when a hoopoe landed close by, then a hoopoe landed, crest raised at first, in the same tree. It was well worth being a little late for breakfast.



First light at the Finca: a lesser spotted woodpecker and a hoopoe in the same tree.

The drive north took us through the granite *berrocal* north of Trujillo then extensive *dehesa* under which we saw the complete set of livestock: pigs, cows, sheep and goats. Averil caught sight of a black-shouldered kite, as did Mavis on the return journey.

We weren't the only people at the castle in Monfragüe National Park this bright, still day. Immediately there was a steady stream of griffon vultures low and close by, drifting slowly along the edge of the hill. We walked to the viewpoint, on the new path that winds around the back. From the top, looking over towards the great rock of Peña Falcón, there must have been 200 griffons, mostly in the air but a good number perched. A black vulture was distant but distinct enough. A Belgian bird photographer with long lens was accompanied by the tamest of robins: so much for the old cliché that robins on the continent are always shy.

Moving on, at Peña Falcón a peregrine flew in front of the rock, dwarfed of course by the many griffons. A little surprisingly the first yellow flowers were showing on Spanish adenocarpus and a wall brown butterfly soaked up some sun. A thrush on the top of the rock was an unexpected mistle thrush, though an expected blue rock thrush did then show close too. We found a griffon on a nest which formerly had belonged to a black stork.

After coffee in Villareal de Juan Carlos we moved onto a picnic site overlooking another griffon cliff, though the main bird interest as we ate was the group of azure-winged magpies. A tame fox here last year had discouraged the AWMs from attending the picnickers but happily it has gone. It took a while but eventually about eight magpies shared some bread left on one of the tables: it felt like they were slowly re-learning their old tricks.

¹ *Woodpeckers of Europe* by Gerard Gorman confirms that both male and female lesser spotted woodpeckers drum. It also says that immature males gain red on their heads by late summer, so as this bird lacked red on the head it was a female.



Azure-winged magpies are returning to the picnic site in Monfragüe NP. Spanish imperial eagle.

Our final stop was at the Portilla del Tiétar, another impressive set of cliffs beside the flooded Tajo. Alongside the road were dozens of pale yellow angel's tears narcissi: in the scrub were flowering pink-coloured Spanish heath and rosemary. There were the inevitable griffons and two high-flying black storks and we found the tiny crucifer shepherd's cress. Then an eagle flew in: a fine Spanish imperial eagle landed on a rock on the top of the Portilla del Tiétar, allowing lots of time for excellent views for everyone. After enjoying another distant blue rock thrush, and once Jan had enthused some local visitors about the eagle, we set off back towards home. There were a few cranes in the *dehesa* along the way.



After re-fuelling the minibus in Trujillo we stopped very briefly by the bullring (*left*), where there were lots of house martins and nestboxes for lesser kestrels among the pantiles but no kestrels back yet for the breeding season.

Bird photographer Steve Fletcher joined us for dinner and afterwards shared some of his photos with us. When I returned to my bedroom a Moorish gecko scuttled up the wall.

14 February: Trujillo and River Tozo

There was a little rain overnight that turned into a cloudy and rather grey day, but remaining dry. We parked in a Trujillo side street next to a thick ivy bush, complete with blackcap, and walked into the *plaza mayor* where preparations for Carnival were under way, a temporary bullring taking up much of the main square. Up at the castle we enjoyed the view of Trujillo's many fine buildings, despite the chill. One castle wall had a luxurious growth of white henbane, with pale yellow flowers regardless of its name, alongside some pale pink snapdragons, the colour confirming they were garden escapes rather than the deep pink wild version. New plants seen in flower were scorpiurus (a scorpion vetch), *Phagnalon rupestre* and ivy-leaved toadflax, and in the sheltered conditions rampion fumitory and navelwort were well developed. A group of four chiffchaffs fed on a road towards the top of the hill, shuffling along the ground rather like dunnocks, and on the castle itself a blue rock thrush perched, albeit partly out of sight. Elsewhere there were crag martins, swallows, black redstart and, of course, large numbers of white storks. After coffee there was time to shop for stamps, a scarf for Paul and, for Sue, a T-shirt with white storks on it, which happily after much discussion in the shop was the right size.

We turned off the motorway just one junction towards Madrid and had our picnics near (or in) the minibus situated next to the River Tozo. Our early afternoon walk took us alongside the river. It was a bit cold and bleak, though there was a lot to see: stonechats and corn buntings on bushes; meadow pipits in and out of longer grass; several snipe, one green sandpiper, a little egret and a kingfisher on the river. A terrapin by the water's edge was moving but seemed in poor health. And all the time we had cranes around us: sometimes in twos and threes, other times bigger flocks moved around and we could hear their calls of 'gru... gru... gru'. Towards the end of the second, grazed field we cut across to Tozo Lake, half hidden in the *dehesa*. A pair of black-winged stilts was on the lake's edge nearest to us and the main water area supported a good selection of winter wildfowl, mainly shovelers, wigeons, gadwalls and teals. Studying the ground under the trees revealed a woodlark and a mavis (song thrush) for Mavis. Six spoonbills then came into view and fed busily in the lake's shallows.

By 3 o'clock we were back at the Finca for some free time; most setting off in various directions for a stroll and some birdwatching. Before dinner, Henri hosted a reception for the group, a chance to hear some of his experiences in the diplomatic service, how Finca Santa Marta started as the first rural accommodation of its type in the area and the ups and downs of growing grapes, almonds and olives. There was more music after dinner, this time with Mavis on the guitar.

15 February: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca

The heavy rain overnight and cloud before breakfast made it feel like we were in for a bad day. Almost everyone was out and we explored the track opposite the gateway marked Casa del Estudiante, which Averil had walked yesterday and seems promising on a better day. In the grey weather and half light we didn't linger and most of the birds were the usual ones heard or half-seen in bushes, though a red kite floated past and a woodlark was singing as we returned.

Happily, the cloud lifted almost magically as we took the first turn off the motorway towards Cáceres. At our first stop overlooking the plains some birdwatchers were leaving as we arrived and they helpfully pointed us in the right direction for some little bustards. There were six birds just in front of the first ridge, in and out of some retama scrub. We also had an excellent view of an Iberian grey shrike, and a crested lark posed on a post so we could examine its beak shape compared with that of the Thekla lark we'd seen a few days ago. A flock of dumpy, fast-flying birds must have been pin-tailed sandgrouse, but it wasn't a good view.



Iberian grey shrike



Onobrychis humilis



Crested lark

Scanning the steppe a little farther along the road revealed golden plovers mingling with the usual lapwings. Sharp-eyed Jan located some pin-tailed sandgrouse on the ground: we counted 15, and no doubt there were more.

The next stop, having parked by the Natura 2000 sign, allowed more of a walk through the steppe. Under our feet were the compact growths of strapwort and paronychia: a small copper butterfly flew by and landed out of the wind so we could see it well and even check the underside. The best bird here was certainly calandra lark, which showed all its features in the air and on the ground. I was surprised to find a couple of blooms of the unusual prostrate pink sainfoin *Onobrychis humilis*.

The late morning coffee stop was in the café in the small town square of Santa Marta de Magasca – they even provided biscuits. Small children dressed as Pinocchio, complete with long nose, were with families in the café, though one boy was keen to remove the nose as soon as possible. Also of note was the stuffed sandgrouse behind the bar. We paused for a photo outside the attractive little *ayuntamiento* – town hall – with two heavily-laden orange trees in front. Several people made purchases in the local shop.

We moved on to our picnic spot in the *ribero* – scrubby and rocky river valley – of the river Almonte. A kingfisher flashed past and several Spanish terrapins hauled out of the river to soak up some sunshine. Just as we were finishing lunch, a cluster of four mobbing ravens alerted us to an immature golden eagle. The ravens seemed to give up and the eagle flew along the low hilltop close to us. A sparrowhawk briefly showed, then an immature Bonelli's eagle took over where the ravens had left off and briefly hassled the golden eagle. The Bonelli's eagle moved on and once again we had excellent views of the golden eagle, including the pale patches on the wings and upper tail characteristic of an immature bird. We took a short stroll along the riverside. There were more terrapins, the kingfisher again, lots of wintering chiffchaffs and several crag martins. A new bird here was grey wagtail, in fact two of them, and the Bonelli's eagle again showed well. A clouded yellow butterfly dashed through as we were leaving.

We stopped briefly by the next crossroads for a chance to scan the landscape in all directions and see the arable/fallow/grazed rotation of the steppe in reality.

A little farther along the circuit a small group of mixed vultures – blacks and griffons – was moving slowly across our field of view. We disturbed an Iberian hare that ran away as we walked to a drovers' trail (a *Cañada Real*). As we stood on the wide *cañada*, by now in bright sunshine, we had a great stroke of luck: a tight flock of little bustards flew past us, so close we could hear the sound of the wind through their white-patterned wings. We watched as they flew over the steppe until they eventually disappeared in the distance. We estimated 40 birds at the time, a very good flock of a bird that is worryingly in decline in Extremadura for unknown reasons.

Heading east, our luck was in again as a great spotted cuckoo flew through the scrub on the right of the minibus. We stopped to search for it: Howard seemed to have a great knack of finding wherever it perched in the mixed cork oak and retama scrub. A little farther along the same road we paused to admire a large flock of Spanish sparrows on fence wires and bushes. Our final stop was in the *Berrocal*, the area of granite outcrops on which Trujillo is built. Pink patches of storksbill were as expected, but Mavis also found some early blooms of the unusual star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogalum concinnum*.



Trujillo from the granite Berrocal.

In the evening we returned to the main square in Trujillo for a meal in La Troya restaurant, our tradition for the Finca's staff night off. It was very much the tail end of Trujillo's Carnival in the litter-strewn main square: there were lots of people eating or drinking in pavement cafés, the temporary bullring was empty and occasionally you'd see someone in fancy dress. There was certainly no problem getting a table for seven in La Troya, as we'd been advised – it was almost empty. We enjoyed a selection of local specialities including *migas* (fried breadcrumbs) and *morago trujillana* (griddled chunks of shoulder of lamb), which all arrived in next to no time. They were almost out of *postres* (desserts) on account of Carnival trade during the day, but ice cream or fruit suited us fine.

16 February: Jaraicejo heath and cork oak, Arrocampo reservoir

Three lesser spotted woodpeckers together before breakfast highlighted what a remarkable week it had been for this species that is now so hard to find in the UK.



Almaraz and the snow-capped Gredos mountains from Miravete Pass.

We drove north up the motorway to the broom, lavender and cistus heath near Jaraicejo. The morning mist – or low cloud – was still in place, so we moved swiftly into the cork oak woodland beyond the heath and conditions began to clear. It was a morning of glimpses: a rock bunting on the heath, nuthatch and firecrest in the cork oak, Thekla lark and Dartford warbler as we re-crossed the now sunny heath. In the wood there were the footprints of red deer and we saw our first jays in the open parkland around the farmstead at the sunny end of the woodland.

After coffee we picnicked at Miravete Pass, where it was surprisingly still and warm. The view over towards the power station at Almaraz and the snow-topped Gredos mountains beyond was quite something. Opposite us, between the fence line and eucalyptus trees, a family group of what looked like ibexes was feeding, captive no doubt. There was a black redstart in the picnic area and we enjoyed our best views of the week of short-toed treecreepers on the slim elm trees. A little stroll into the adjacent black pines revealed angel's tears narcissi, mostly in bud, purple sand crocuses and several pale blue real crocuses. Later research showed these were *Crocus carpetanus* and that the egg case on a stone was that of a praying mantis.

Moving on, we parked at the information centre at Arrocampo Reservoir and borrowed a key for the hides 'just in case', though on this now warm afternoon it wasn't really needed. Some terrapins and coots were all that was on show at the first viewpoint. Adjacent to the first hide there was a good view of a purple swamp-hen and others were 'tooting'. Walking on, we heard Cetti's warblers, saw snipe, green sandpiper, Spanish sparrows, griffon vultures and lots of chiffchaffs and stonechats, but it wasn't the most productive of walks bird-wise. We had a quick visit to the church in Saucedilla, one of 16 urban Special Protection Areas in Spain on account of colonies of lesser kestrels. Sadly there were no falcons there yet, as in Trujillo, though we did see new kestrel nest boxes built into the church and noted the signage about the birds.

A last stop by the road causeway across the reservoir was unproductive apart from a marsh harrier, especially with the wind getting up. We returned home.

Our final meal included collecting the holiday highlights noted below.

17 February: Return to Madrid

Despite being – or perhaps because it was – our last morning, several of us were up for the half hour of light before breakfast and were rewarded by a woodlark in full, flowing song.

We were away just before 10 o'clock, in good time so we detoured via the Trujillo bullring in case a lesser kestrel had turned up since we last visited, but no luck. The drive was fast and uneventful, with the motorway as quiet as usual. A small group of cranes flew over us and many more were scattered in *dehesa*, appropriately just before the sign to say we'd left Extremadura, much as a flight had welcomed us a week ago. There was a spoonbill on a pool, a few griffons and several red kites, then Sue caught sight of black-shouldered kite from the R5 motorway south of Madrid.

We stopped at a service station to fill the minibus's tank and grab a quick coffee, and were soon back at the airport with a splendid week and 1302 kilometres behind us. There was time to drop bags and eat our picnics before going through security for a smooth and on-time easyJet flight home.



Spanish sparrows – a holiday highlight.

Highlights of the week, as nominated by group members

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Paul | Telling three types of larks from one another; little bustards. |
| Jan | The row of Spanish sparrows, three strands with their chainmail waistcoats. |
| Howard & Sue | Cranes in their natural setting; storks; griffons at eye level; Alcollarín Reservoir. |
| Averil | The sound of cranes; little bustards; Laura's bright face in the morning; the picnic in the river valley with the two eagles. |
| Mavis | Chris shouting "Bustards flying" and their sound; vultures at eye level; golden and Bonelli's eagles; sand crocus and four different daisies. |
| Chris | Lesser spotted woodpeckers; little bustards flying; Portuguese dappled white; crocuses. |

SYSTEMATIC LISTS

A summary of sightings contributed by the whole group at the daily 'call-over'. All dates are February 2015.

BIRDS

Little grebe	About 6 at both Alcollarín and Tozo reservoirs.
Great crested grebe	Seen at Alcollarín and Sierra Brava reservoirs.
Black-necked grebe	3 at Alcollarín reservoir.
Cormorant	Seen daily.
Squacco heron	One at Alcollarín reservoir, 11 th .
Cattle egret	Seen on four days.
Little egret	Seen on four days. c.30 at Alcollarín reservoir, 11 th .
Great white egret	Seen on five days, including by the motorway on the outward journey (near Arrocampo) and flying over Finca Santa Marta.
Grey heron	Seen daily.
Black stork	One at Moheda Alta, 12 th and two over Tiétar cliffs, 13 th .
White stork	Seen every day.
Spoonbill	5 at Alcollarín, 11 th , 6 at Tozo, 14 th and one on a pool by the motorway, 17 th .
Egyptian goose	2 at Alcollarín reservoir, 11 th , one at Tozo, 14 th .
Shelduck	13 at Alcollarín reservoir, 11 th .
Wigeon	Seen at Alcollarín and Tozo reservoirs.
Gadwall	Seen at Alcollarín and Tozo reservoirs.
Teal	Seen at Alcollarín and Tozo reservoirs.
Mallard	Seen on four days.
Pintail	2 at Alcollarín reservoir, 11 th .
Shoveler	Hundreds on both Alcollarín and Sierra Brava reservoirs, also at Tozo.
Pochard	Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
Black-shouldered kite	Good views for some in the group at Moheda Alta, 12 th , seen on the drive both to and from Monfragüe and one south of Madrid, 17 th .
Red kite	Seen daily, including around the Finca, and many on both journeys to and from Madrid.
Griffon vulture	Seen almost every day, including about 200 in the air in one view at Monfragüe.
Black vulture	Seen at Monfragüe and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
Marsh harrier	Seen on three days: Alcollarín, Moheda Alta and at Arrocampo.
Sparrowhawk	One seen on 15 th near Santa Marta de Magasca.
Common buzzard	Seen every day.
Spanish imperial eagle	One at Monfragüe on 13 th .
Golden eagle	An immature mobbed by ravens then a Bonelli's eagle near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th .
Bonelli's eagle	An immature with the golden eagle near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th .
Common kestrel	Seen every day.
Peregrine	One at Monfragüe on 13 th and one at Tozo on 14 th .
Red-legged partridge	Heard or seen almost daily.
Water rail	Two heard at Arrocampo on 16 th .
Moorhen	Seen at Arrocampo.
Purple swamphen	Seen well at Arrocampo on 16 th .
Coot	Seen at Alcollarín and at Arrocampo.
Crane	Seen on both Madrid journeys, many hundreds in the rice fields and at Moheda Alta, and many at Tozo.
Little bustard	6 near Santa Marta de Magasca, then a flock of 40 over the <i>Cañada Real</i> , all on the 15 th .
Great bustard	Three small groups of 2, 3 and 3 near Campo Lugar on 11 th .
Stone-curlew	9 seen (and probably more hidden) near Campo Lugar on 11 th .
Black-winged stilt	2 at Tozo reservoir, 14 th .
Golden plover	Small flocks on steppes on 2 days, near Campo Lugar and Santa Marta de Magasca.
Lapwing	Seen every day.
Snipe	A few at the River Tozo and Arrocampo.
Green sandpiper	Singles on 3 days: Alcollarín, River Tozo and Arrocampo.
Black-headed gull	Seen every day.
Lesser black-backed gull	Seen on two days; the biggest group was flying past Trujillo.
Pin-tailed sandgrouse	A flock in flight then 15 on the ground near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th .

Feral pigeon	Seen every day.
Woodpigeon	Seen almost daily.
Collared dove	Seen daily.
Great spotted cuckoo	One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th .
Kingfisher	4 at Alcollarín, seen on River Tozo and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
Hoopoe	Seen daily, including regularly around the Finca.
Green woodpecker	Seen or heard on three days at Finca Santa Marta, and in cork oak near Jaraicejo.
Great spotted woodpecker	Seen or heard on three days, at Finca Santa Marta and near Jaraicejo.
Lesser spotted woodpecker	Seen on four days at Finca Santa Marta, with both female and male seen drumming. Three together on 16 th .
Calandra lark	Seen on both visits to the plains, at Campo Lugar and Santa Marta de Magasca.
Crested lark	Seen daily.
Thekla lark	Seen at the heaths near Madroñera and Jaraicejo.
Woodlark	Seen daily, and in fine song at the Finca.
Skylark	At Campo Lugar and then flocks of c.300 and 60 near the <i>Cañada Real</i> on 15 th .
Crag martin	Seen daily, with two perched on a windowsill of the café near Miravete Pass.
Swallow	Seen daily.
House martin	Seen on four days in various towns.
Meadow pipit	Seen daily.
Grey wagtail	2 on the river near Santa Marta de Magasca.
White wagtail	Seen daily, and at least 50 at Alcollarín reservoir.
Wren	Seen or heard daily.
Duncock	One at the Finca and one on the heath near Jaraicejo, both on 16 th .
Robin	Seen daily, including one exceptionally tame bird at the castle at Monfragüe.
Black redstart	Seen daily.
Stonechat	Seen daily.
Blue rock thrush	Seen in Monfragüe and on the castle in Trujillo.
Blackbird	Seen daily.
Song thrush	Seen daily.
Redwing	Heard and seen in flight at the Finca on 11 th , and heard again on 12 th , but then seem to have left the area.
Mistle thrush	One in Monfragüe and two flew past the picnic site at Miravete Pass.
Cetti's warbler	Recorded at Moheda Alta and at Arrocampo
Zitting cisticola (fan-tailed warbler)	Recorded on four days, including near Campo Lugar and at Arrocampo.
Dartford warbler	4 seen at Madroñera heath and a fleeting glimpse at Jaraicejo heath.
Sardinian warbler	Seen daily.
Blackcap	Seen daily.
Chiffchaff	Common, seen daily.
Long-tailed tit	Seen or heard on four days.
Blue tit	Seen daily.
Great tit	Seen daily.
Penduline tit	Heard only, at Arrocampo.
Short-toed treecreeper	Seen or heard daily, with the best view at the Miravete Pass.
Nuthatch	Seen at Jaraicejo on 16 th .
Iberian grey shrike	Seen daily.
Jay	Seen at Jaraicejo.
Azure-winged magpie	Seen daily.
Magpie	Seen daily.
Jackdaw	Seen daily, always in towns, namely Zorita, Trujillo and Saucedilla.
Raven	Seen daily.
Spotless starling	Seen daily.
House sparrow	Seen daily.
Spanish sparrow	Seen almost daily, often in large flocks.
Chaffinch	Seen daily.
Serin	Seen or heard daily.
Greenfinch	Seen around the Finca on three days.
Goldfinch	Seen daily.
Linnet	Seen almost daily.
Hawfinch	Seen on three days, especially at Finca Santa Marta.
Rock bunting	One briefly seen at Jaraicejo on 16 th .
Corn bunting	Seen almost daily.

MAMMALS	
Wild boar <i>Sus scrofa</i>	Rootings
Red deer <i>Cervus elaphus hispanicus</i>	Heard at the azure-winged magpie picnic site in Monfragüe National Park, and footprints on the heath at Jaraicejo.
Iberian hare <i>Lepus granatensis</i>	
Rabbit <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Dead
Iberian mole <i>Talpa occidentales</i>	Molehills

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS
Spanish terrapin <i>Mauremys leprosa</i>
Moorish gecko <i>Tarentola mauretana</i>
Iberian water frog <i>Rana perezi</i>

BUTTERFLIES	
Portuguese dappled white	Wall brown
Clouded yellow	Small Copper



Iberian water frog



Portuguese dappled white

OTHER INVERTEBRATES
7-spot ladybird <i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>
Pine processionary moth <i>Thaumetopoea pityocampa</i> tents
House spider <i>Tegenaria gigantea</i> (or similar species)



Caterpillars of the tiger moth or winter webworm *Ocnogyna boetica*



Praying mantis *Mantis religiosa* egg case

PLANTS

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

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

Where there is no number, usually these are plants in floras from northern Europe

e.g. *Wild Flowers of Britain & Europe* by Fitter, Fitter & Blamey.

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
<i>Pinus nigra</i>	Black pine	4
Fagaceae		
<i>Quercus rotundifolia</i>	Holm oak	26
<i>Quercus suber</i>	Cork oak	27
Ulmaceae		
<i>Ulmus minor</i>	Elm sp.	c. 38
Urticaceae		
<i>Urtica membranacea</i>	Membranous nettle	49
<i>Urtica urens</i>	Annual nettle	
Polygonaceae		
<i>Rumex bucephalophorus</i>	Horned dock	
<i>Rumex scutatus</i>	Rubble dock or French sorrel	NiF
Caryophyllaceae		
<i>Corrigiola litoralis</i>	Strapwort	
<i>Paronychia capita</i>	Paronychia	134
<i>Spergularia arvensis</i>	Corn spurrey	
<i>Silene colorata</i>	Mediterranean catchfly	180
Ranunculaceae		
<i>Ranunculus</i> sp.	Water crowfoot sp.	
<i>Ranunculus sceleratus</i>	Celery-leaved buttercup	251
Fumariaceae		
<i>Fumaria capreolata</i>	Ramping fumitory	303
Cruciferae		
<i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i>	Wild radish	369
<i>Sinapsis arvensis</i>	Charlock	
<i>Sisymbrium altissimum</i>	Tall rocket	
<i>Teesdalia nudicaulis</i>	Shepherd's cress	
Resedaceae		
<i>Sesamoides canescens</i>	Sesamoides	Polunin 375a
Crassulaceae		
<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort	396
Rosaceae		
<i>Rosa canina</i>	Common dogrose	NiF
Leguminosae		
<i>Acacia dealbata</i>	'Mimosa' or Silver wattle	432 P
<i>Adenocarpus argyrophyllus</i>	Spanish adenocarpus	
<i>Astragalus lusitanicus</i>	Iberian milk-vetch	504
<i>Cercis siliquastrum</i>	Judas tree	430 P
<i>Cytisus multiflorus</i>	White broom	
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	Broom	456
<i>Lygos monosperma</i>	Retama	480 NiF
<i>Onobrychis humilis</i>	a sainfoin	
<i>Lupinus angustifolius</i>	Narrow-leaved lupin	486 NiF
<i>Medicago arabica</i>	Spotted medick	623 NiF
<i>Scorpiurus muricatus</i>	Scorpiurus, a scorpion vetch	684
Oxalidaceae		
<i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>	Bermuda buttercup	735
Geraniaceae		
<i>Geranium molle</i>	Dovesfoot cranesbill	741
<i>Geranium lucidum</i>	Shining cranesbill	749 NiF
<i>Erodium cicutarum</i>	Common storksbill	761

Meliaceae		
<i>Melia azedarach</i>	Indian bead tree or Persian lilac	843 P
Violaceae		
<i>Viola (arvensis) kitaibeliana</i>	Dwarf pansy	931
Thymelaeaceae		
<i>Daphne gnidium</i>	Daphne	936
Cistaceae		
<i>Cistus albidus</i>	Grey-leaved cistus	961 NiF
<i>Cistus salviifolius</i>	Sage-leaved cistus	965
<i>Cistus ladanifer</i>	Gum cistus	971 NiF
Cactaceae		
<i>Opuntia maxima (=ficus-indica)</i>	Prickly pear	1040
Umbelliferae		
<i>Ferula communis</i>	Giant fennel	1141 NiF
<i>Smyrniolum olustatum</i>	Alexanders	1087 NiF
Ericaceae		
<i>Arbutus unedo</i>	Strawberry tree	1176
<i>Erica arborea</i>	Tree heath	1178 NiF
<i>Erica australis</i>	Spanish heath	1181
Rubiaceae		
<i>Galium verticillatum</i>	a tiny bedstraw	1299
<i>Rubia peregrina</i>	Wild madder	1305 NiF
Oleaceae		
<i>Phillyrea angustifolia</i>	Phillyrea or false olive	1246
<i>Olea europaea</i>	Olive	1248
<i>Olea europaea</i> spp. <i>oleaster</i>	Wild olive	1248a
Boraginaceae		
<i>Anchusa undulata</i>	Undulate anchusa	1406
Labiatae		
<i>Lamium bifidum</i>	a white-flowered deadnettle	NiF
<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 NiF
<i>Stachys arvensis</i>	Field woundwort	
Solanaceae		
<i>Hyoscyamus albus</i>	White henbane	1555
<i>Datura stramonium</i>	Thornapple (fruit)	1575
Scrophulariaceae		
<i>Verbascum sinuatum</i>		1601 NiF
<i>Cymbalaria muralis</i>	Ivy-leaved toadflax	1632
Caprifoliaceae		
<i>Lonicera implexa</i>	a perfoliate honeysuckle	1713
Compositae		
<i>Anthemis arvensis</i>	Corn mayweed	
<i>Bellis annua</i>	Annual daisy	1791
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Perennial daisy	1792
<i>Bellis sylvestris</i>	Southern daisy	1793
<i>Phagnalon rupestre</i>		1831
<i>Calendula arvensis</i>	Field marigold	1908
<i>Galactites tomentosa</i>	Galactites	1971 NiF
<i>Silybum marianum</i>	Milk thistle	1982 NiF
<i>Centaurea calcitrapa</i>	Red star-thistle	1990 NiF
Liliaceae		
<i>Asphodelus aestivus</i>	Common asphodel	2089 NiF
<i>Ornithogalum concinnum</i>	a spiked star-of-Bethlehem	Polunin 1639b
<i>Urginea maritima</i>	Sea squill (leaves & dead flower spikes)	2163
<i>Asparagus acutiflorus?</i>	A shrubby asparagus	c 2212 NiF
<i>Narcissus triandrus</i>	Angel's tears	Polunin
Iridaceae		
<i>Crocus carpetanus</i>	Polunin 1678b)	
<i>Romulea columnae</i>	Sand crocus	2320
<i>Arisarum simorrhinum</i>	Friar's cowl	2378

Gramineae		
<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	Lesser reedmace	
<i>Arundo donax</i>	Giant reed	2494
FERNS (PTERIDOPHYTA)		
<i>Cheilanthes hispanica</i>	Spanish cheilanthes	2521
<i>Asplenium adiantum-nigrum</i>	Black spleenwort	
<i>Ceterach officinarum</i>	Rustyback fern	2532
<i>Polypodium vulgare</i>	Polypody	



Sand crocus



Crocus carpetanus (MP)



Undulate anchusa



Annual daisies