



# *Honeyguide*

## **WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS**

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**Extremadura**  
**27 September – 4 October 2016**

### Holiday participants

Jill Jordan  
Jean Dunn  
Malcolm and Helen Crowder  
Chris and Mary Ash  
Anne Nicholas

Christine and Oliver Dix  
David and Diana Melzack  
Margaret Dixey  
Colin Taylor  
Ellie Standen

### Leaders

Martin Kelsey and Chris Durdin

Our base for the holiday was Finca Santa Marta [www.fincasantamarta.es](http://www.fincasantamarta.es)

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

Report: daily diary and bird list by Martin Kelsey, other bits by Chris Durdin.

Photos by group members (indicated by initials) and Chris Durdin,  
all taken during the holiday week.

Cover photos: top row, black-winged stilts, lesser black-backed gulls and a little egret on the rice fields.

Middle: swallowtail on sea squill (HC), merenderas, broad scarlet (HC).

Bottom: Trujillo (HC).



Above: the group under the big almond tree in the car park area just before we left Extremadura, with Laura from Finca Santa Marta (centre, front).

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 of £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust. This was combined with money raised for SEO through our Spanish Pyrenees holiday in June, and £1030 (€1184) was transferred to SEO.

Marcelino Cardalliaguet, SEO officer in Extremadura, came to speak to our group on 29 September (see account on page 5). This year's donation brings the total given to SEO since the first Honeyguide holiday in Spain in 1991 to £17,335.

The total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 as at the end of September 2016 was £110,879.



## Introduction

Although this was Honeyguide's 22<sup>nd</sup> group in Extremadura since 1998 and the 19<sup>th</sup> staying at Finca Santa Marta, it was also a new venture: our first holiday in autumn. With so many groups over a period of 19 years, mostly in March but a couple during 'crane season' in February (there were two groups some years, in case the sums are a puzzle), could we try Extremadura at a different time of year? My conversation about this idea with Martin wasn't a long one: apart from his enthusiasm for the idea, only six words, "Late September / early October / violet dropwing" come to mind.

There is always a little uncertainty about a new venture, but a fully booked group showed the idea was well-received, including five in the group, like me, returning to see the region in a different season. Extremadura had had an Indian summer, like us in the UK only more so, and the autumn rains and the green flush of a 'second spring' hadn't arrived. Nonetheless there was lots to see: birds, of course, bulbs in flowers here and there despite the drought, and many of us were captivated by the numbers and variety of dragonflies, including species recently colonising Spain from Africa as the climate changes. All in all a success, as this holiday report reveals, and I suspect we'll come back to Extremadura in autumn before too long.

Chris Durdin

## Itinerary

- 27 September Transfer from Madrid to Finca Santa Marta.
- 28 September The plains of Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir.
- 29 September Monfragüe National Park.
- 30 September Walk around Finca Santa Marta, visit to Trujillo, River Almonte, Cabezuelas Lake.
- 1 October Arrocampo Reservoir, Valdecañas dam and River Almonte (three bridges).
- 2 October Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca with stops also at Tamuja and Magasca Rivers.
- 3 October Rice fields near Madrigalejo, *dehesa* of Moheda Alta and rice fields near Palazuelo.
- 4 October Return to Madrid.

### Tuesday 27 September: Transfer from Madrid to Finca Santa Marta.

The Honeyguiders arrived just ahead of schedule at 15.45 at Madrid airport's Terminal 1 where they were met by Martin. After completing paperwork for the minibus hire, we set off under clear blue skies to negotiate the traffic on Madrid's ring road before taking the motorway for Extremadura. We stopped for refreshments at the bar Las Esparteras, where two or three members of the party were lucky enough to get views of a passing raptor which was almost certainly a golden eagle. We were ready to continue our journey at 18.00 and from there it was a clear two-hours on an almost traffic-free road, heading south-west. Visibility was excellent, with the majestic Gredos Mountains to our right for much of the time.

We were greeted at Finca Santa Marta by Laura and Henri, as red-rumped and barn swallows were gathering in the fading light. After unloading the vans, checking into rooms and freshening up, the team were ready for some pre-dinner drinks. We then repaired to the La Higuera bar for dinner in the nearby hamlet of Pago de San Clemente where we were warmly welcomed by Conchi and her son Urbano. Returning to the minibuses, there was a praying mantis on an adjacent parked car.

### Wednesday 28 September: The plains of Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir.

Dawn broke at 08.00 and to the sound of singing woodlarks the group breakfasted at 08.30. The weather promised to be sunny and hot, ameliorated by a fresh easterly breeze. After watching a pied flycatcher in the olives beside the car park, we set off southwards (after pausing at the Finca's gate to watch a black vulture drift past close by), crossing the watershed divide from the Tagus to Guadiana rivers, passing through the town of Zorita and then onto the plains.



Pied flycatcher (JD); red-veined darter, on which the blue underside to the eyes is a feature (HC); paddy melon or gooseberry cucumber.

The long summer drought and non-arrival of September rains meant that the landscape bore little sign yet of autumnal change, remaining parched and arid. Despite searching we failed to find any great bustards, but there were impressive numbers of passage migrants such as whinchats and northern wheatears. Crested and Thekla larks were also present and we saw a rather distant flock of calandra larks. A few dragonflies moved along the roadside: red-veined darters mainly. Our curiosity was raised when finding a creeping plant with rather spiny, globose fruit. The species was not in any of the guidebooks, and eventually its identity was established thanks to a fortuitous encounter we had with a local expert in the bar near Campo Lugar where we had our late morning coffee: it was the paddy melon or gooseberry cucumber *Cucumis myriocarpus*<sup>1</sup>, an exotic species native to tropical Africa.

After our refreshments we headed to the reservoir of Alcollarín. At the dam wall there were several hundred house martins. We made a visit to the western shore where a magnificent female peregrine stood at the water's edge, with little ringed plovers and a lapwing seemingly unconcerned by its nearby presence. There were huge rafts of mallard and as we stood parties of pintail dropped from the skies, birds on passage en route to West Africa. On a small island there was an excellent array of long-legged birds: a black stork, twenty or so spoonbills, along with great egret, little egret and cattle egret. We then moved to picnic area which offered shade and a view across a small pool. There was a smattering of waders here, such as dunlin and redshank, as well as ducks like shoveler. It was along the edge of this pool that a rather odd-looking duck was discovered which on closer inspection turned out to be a female or juvenile white-headed duck, only the fifth record ever for Extremadura! The area below the retainer wall of this pool proved extremely productive for insects, with butterflies including African grass blue, long-tailed blue and Lang's short-tailed blue, and lesser emperor and broad scarlet dragonflies. We also had superb views of a blue-eye damselfly.

We proceeded to the far end of the reservoir, relocating the peregrine which had been feeding on a coot. On this calmer stretch of water there were surprisingly large numbers of little grebe, as well as great crested grebe. We took a short walk at the point where the river entered the lake. Several fine yellow wagtails were present as well as more dragonflies: red-veined darters, broad scarlets and lesser emperors. We made a final stop at the dam wall as black-headed gulls were starting their arrival to roost and a mixed group of little and great crested grebes foraged nearby.

Back at the Finca we had excellent views of two woodlarks in the car park. Henri again hosted early evening drinks and we then returned to the La Higuera bar for dinner and a highly convivial evening.

#### **Thursday 29 September: Monfragüe National Park.**

The breezy conditions continued today, as did the wall-to-wall sunshine. We headed north, passing Trujillo and descending from the granite landscape around the town onto the undulating *dehesas* that filled the view to the horizon. As we approached the Monfragüe National Park we started getting sightings of griffon vultures. We made our first stop near the castle, where we parked below an outcrop of rock where we were able to get our first really close views of these massive birds. Completely dwarfed were groups of crag martins, house martins and red-rumped swallows. As we ascended to the castle, through rocky terrain with wild olives and holm oaks, we caught glimpses of hawfinches. There was a magnificent view from the top of the ridge, especially looking southwards which afforded us a breath-taking panorama. Griffon vultures passed us closely, while Helen found a very distant red deer, our first of the day.



Monfragüe Castle; the group at Peña Falcón; and griffon vulture (JD).

As we started our descent the stragglers were rewarded by brief views of a white-rumped swift flying in and out of the castle, where on further investigation we found high in the ceiling an old red-rumped swallows' nest with the head of the swift's chick, close to fledging, appearing.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cucumis\\_myriocarpus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cucumis_myriocarpus)



We continued to the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos for coffee and then moved onto the picnic site close to the Tiétar River for lunch. Here we saw more red deer at extremely close range, as well as both griffon and black vultures. A pale-phase booted eagle put in an appearance. At this stop, as indeed at every other, pied flycatchers were present: testament to the large passage through the region at this time of the year.



A surprisingly tame red deer by our picnic spot; and two-tailed pasha.

After lunch we followed the Tiétar River to the viewpoint of the Portilla del Tiétar. Along the roadside were patches of autumn snowflake and autumn squill in flower. Red deer stags were bellowing from across the valley, while at other times the only sound was that of squabbling griffon vultures. Blackcaps and Sardinian warblers foraged in the bushes beside us, while some of us also had good views of a male blue rock thrush. We then returned to the Tagus River and made a short walk long the shady mixed woodland on the north side of the castle ridge. Common darters were perched on bare twigs above our heads and we had views of short-toed treecreepers and more hawfinches in flight. But pride of place was a two-tailed pasha found by Ellie, which obligingly perched on a twig. And then to add the cream topping, a fine adult Bonelli's eagle soared into view above us. Our final stop was to admire the view across to the massive Peña Falcón rock, where griffon vultures were assembling. A peregrine was spotted perched on the edge of the cliff face. It was then time to leave, retracing our route back to the Finca.

Before this evening's dinner at Soterraña in Madroñera, Marcelino from SEO/Birdlife gave his presentation on conservation in Extremadura, a cause supported by the group's donation (see page 2). The importance here for birds was illustrated by some statistics: Extremadura holds 42% of Europe's black vultures; 7% of Europe's great bustards, though they are declining; 22% of the world's Spanish imperial eagles, about 50 pairs; 10% of Europe's white storks and 65% of Europe's wintering cranes. Marcelino went on to explain that about 35% of SEO's work involves studies, such as national censuses. Some 40% is on conservation action, including tackling developments such as windfarms and their access roads in inappropriate areas; and a campaign against illegal poisoning is another area of action. The remaining 25% is environmental education, communication and volunteer programmes. The national censuses mean there are 201 bird species with quantified populations, as Marcelino put it, revealing many concerns. Little bustards have declined by 75% in the 10 year period 1998-2008. A survey in 2014 of great bustards shows a decline in the last decade. Barn swallows have gone down by 15% in 15 years; little owls have declined by 51% in the same period. The common thread through all of this seems to be the decline in traditional farming. Challenged for some good news, Marcelino said, "We are [still] here", in contrast with the struggles of some local NGOs. The increase in vultures and in wintering cranes were, he agreed, positive notes.

#### Friday 30 September: Walk at Finca Santa Marta, visit to Trujillo, River Almonte, Cabezuelas Lake.

The warm weather continued and the stiff breeze had abated somewhat as we spent the first half of the morning taking a walk through the grounds of the Finca, through vineyards, almond orchards, olive groves,



Brown argus and mallow skipper, both on *Daphne gnidium* at Finca Santa Marta (HC).

past a line of cork oak trees to a stand of stone pines at the highest point of the property. Red-rumped swallows and house martins were overhead almost continuously. Several pied flycatchers and one common redstart were seen at the edge of the garden. In the areas of longer vegetation, now quite desiccated after the summer drought, there were large numbers of brown argus butterflies, and we also found a pristine mallow skipper and a Bath white.

We then drove to Trujillo for refreshments and to explore the historic centre of this small market town, finding a geranium bronze butterfly on flowers in a container as we walked up to the Plaza Mayor. From our seats in a bar beside the main square we could see the succession of history from the Moorish fort dominating the skyline, the early medieval Spanish fortified palaces and then the more ornate 16<sup>th</sup> century buildings close to the square itself. Crag martins swooped close to the roof tops, and we had several sightings of pallid swifts as well.

We walked up to the castle for our picnic lunch, finding a shady spot which gave a superb view back towards the Sierra de los Lagares where we had walked that morning. Both swallowtail and scarce swallowtail were seen, and white henbane remarkably looked quite green despite growing on a harsh south-facing stone wall.



The statue of Francisco Pizarro in Trujillo's main square (JD); and the view from the castle over the town's roofs towards the Sierra de los Lagares, with the bullring just visible in the centre (HC).

We then drove to the River Almonte to explore the pools of water which were all that remained of the river by this stage of early autumn. There were several dragonfly species, including broad scarlet and epaulet skimmer, but most exciting was a superb juvenile golden eagle which glided at quite low altitude upstream.

We completed the day at the small Cabezuelas Lake, near Aldea del Obispo, where we managed to get excellent views of a violet dropwing dragonfly, a superb specimen. Little ringed plover, green and common sandpiper and grey heron were also at the water's edge.



Reflections of the clouds and *dehesa* in Cabezuelas Lake (C Dix); violet dropwing.

We were back at the Finca in good time for tea and checklists, after which several members of the group braved the swimming pool before we went back to Madroñera for dinner.

#### **Saturday 1 October: Arrocampo Reservoir, Valdecañas dam and River Almonte (three bridges).**

The fine weather continued with temperatures approaching 27°C. After breakfast we headed north-east to the Arrocampo Reservoir, with the building of the Almaráz nuclear power station in the late 1970s. Its function is to provide cooling water for the plant. The relatively constant water level and slightly higher than normal water temperature ensure ideal conditions for a broad fringe of emergent vegetation dominated by *Typha*. This is a scarce habitat in the north of Extremadura and provides a home to a large number of breeding herons and egrets. Although many of these birds leave the area in the autumn, we did have sightings of several great white egrets as well as a fine squacco heron. We obtained very brief glimpses of some wintering bluethroats, as well as reed warbler and willow warbler. Perhaps the best view of all was of a purple gallinule which spent several minutes pulling at a dead fish at the water's edge. Our proximity to the Monfragüe National Park meant that almost the whole time there were vultures in the sky.



The main wildlife interest on the visit was the Odonata, and we had excellent views of three species new for the holiday: long skimmer and the delightful banded groundling are both species of African origin, while we also saw a few Iberian bluetail damselflies.



Banded groundling (HC); long skimmer (female, JD) and long skimmer (male).

After coffee, we headed up a small valley just south of the Tagus River near the Valdecañas dam. This was an area of mixed woodland with rocky outcrops, again with griffon vultures, dominated by white poplar and two species of mastic. Hawfinches sang but were elusive, but a couple of members of the group did get a sighting of a male lesser spotted woodpecker.

We then spent the rest of the afternoon beside the River Almonte near Jaraicejo, where we enjoyed the wonderful juxtaposition of three bridges, spanning engineering skills from 1450 to the early 1990s. A flock of Spanish sparrows drew our attention at the start. Large numbers of Iberian water frogs were present around the remaining pools of water in the otherwise dry river-bed. We found a stand of merendera growing on the flat drovers' track beside the river and a western willow spreadwing obligingly perched on a twig of holm oak.



Two views of the three bridges: close by, and behind a western willow spreadwing.

We were back at the Finca in good time for the checklist and that evening returned to the restaurant in Madroñera for dinner.

### **Sunday 2 October: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca with stops at Tamuja and Magasca Rivers.**

Albeit sunny all day, we had a fresh easterly breeze which moderated the temperature significantly. We spent the day on the plains north-west of Trujillo, surrounding the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. At our first stop we enjoyed a superb view of a little owl perched beside a roller nest box. Parties of corn buntings crossed our field of view almost constantly. We continued along a minor road, finding a place to pull over and get out to scan. It was here that two great bustards were spotted flying in the distance and then landing in a field close to the road. Almost immediately afterwards a party of black-bellied sandgrouse flew across our field of view. We were able to approach the great bustards and saw that there were indeed four birds in the field and we could watch them as they preened, quite unconcerned.

Continuing our route, we started clocking up good totals of migrant northern wheatears and whinchats perched on the wires. We stopped at the crest of a deep valley looking down on the dried-up course of the Tamuja River, where around the remaining pools of water we could see kingfisher, green sandpiper and little ringed plover. The scenery was spectacular.

After coffee at a very friendly bar in Santa Marta de Magasca, we crossed to the Magasca River to the north, finding patches of shade deep in the valley for our picnic. Here migrant hawkers and blue emperor dragonflies were present, as well as small birds like spotted flycatcher and grey wagtail.

We entered the plains again and took a walk along an ancient drovers' trail. Christine noticed feathers on some wire, and we found, sadly, a freshly dead pin-tailed sandgrouse which had clearly collided with a fence. But we were soon distracted by parties of calandra larks and patches of merendera on areas of bare soil on the trail. Again, the wide open, parched landscape was very evocative, under a huge dome of the sky.



The dry plains around Santa Marta de Magasca; wasp spider, *Argiope lobata*.

Returning towards Trujillo we paused at the start of the granite outcrop scenery, where there was a large flock of Spanish sparrows, butterflies like long-tailed blue and brown argus as well as a very fine wasp spider, *Argiope lobata* (a different species to the one seen in southern Britain). The afternoon concluded with a stop which afforded us an excellent view of Trujillo, showing in particular the town wall and medieval palaces (photo on front cover).

We returned to Trujillo in the evening for dinner in La Troya restaurant, where we enjoyed an excellent meal of local dishes and took in the splendour of the Plaza Mayor lit up at night.

### **Monday 3 October: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, *dehesa* of Moheda Alta, rice fields near Palazuelo.**

The wind completely dropped today, make it feel even warmer than it had been previously. Before breakfast a group of nine hawfinches gave some excellent views and a blue rock thrush was singing on one of the roofs. We drove south across the plains of Zorita onto the irrigated arable lands near Madrigalejo, dominated by rice fields, maize, tomatoes and orchards of plums, peaches and olives. We stopped by the disused railway station of the town but despite searching failed to find any roosting stone-curlews – perhaps shepherds with a large flock of sheep had disturbed them just minutes before our arrival. However, the soundscape was dominated by the chortling and whooping of flocks of spotless starlings. South of Madrigalejo we stopped again to admire a gathering of perhaps a hundred white storks. A marsh harrier quartered the rice crops while in the ditches in front of us we were teased by the rather elusive red avadavats (with males in full bright red breeding plumage) and common waxbills.



Male epaulet skimmer eating a fly (HC).

We stopped for coffee at a little village bar in Obando and then drove to the nearby *dehesa* of Moheda Alta. Here we walked through the open woodland to the edge of rice fields to use a hide looking across the fields. We could imagine what it would be like in winter with thousands of feeding cranes, but while there we did get sightings of more red avadavats and parties of Spanish sparrows. The *dehesa* was very dry, so there were few plants in flower, apart from the sea squills. But we were entertained by large numbers of blue-winged grasshoppers and some rather showy epaulet skimmers.

After lunch in the picnic area we spent the afternoon on the rice fields near Palazuelo. Here we found several fields which had been harvested and then ploughed over (or more appropriately 'mashed over' by tractors), so that the wet mud was churned up. These fields were excellent for parties of waders, especially black-winged stilts, and numerous lesser black-backed gulls. At one field a group of twenty glossy ibises came in to feed. In a ditch there was a leech-like creature that we later found out was a soldier-fly larva<sup>2</sup>. However it was the myriad of dragonflies, especially broad scarlets and red-veined darters, that especially caught our attention.

<sup>2</sup> There are photos and movies of soldier fly larvae on <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stratiomyidae>





A lesser black-backed gull drops in by a group of glossy ibises.

As we left the rice growing area we pulled off the road by a field of rough pasture, one of the few grass fields that was green for miles around, and we were delighted to see a group of about 17 little bustards. We had excellent views of this fast-declining species, most of them with gapes open because of the heat of the afternoon. After a final stop near the village of Campo Lugar to check fields for stone-curlews, without luck, we returned to the Finca.

For our final evening we returned to the La Higuera bar in Pago de San Clemente for dinner where each of the group gave their highlights for the holiday (noted below).

#### **Tuesday 4 October: Return to Madrid.**

The group assembled after breakfast for photos under the almond tree in the car park and the two minivans were loaded. We bade farewell to Laura and Vasilika and set off on our return to Madrid ahead of schedule at about 09.45. We enjoyed fine weather as we retraced our journey to Madrid, the slight haze on the impressive Gredos Mountains giving them a slightly ephemeral appearance. We stopped about half way for refreshments and a last opportunity to purchase local gastronomic products such as chocolate-coated figs and cheeses. After a second stop to top up fuel tanks on the outskirts of Madrid we arrived at the airport with plenty of time to unload and check-in for the afternoon flight back to Gatwick.

#### **Highlights of the week, as nominated by group members**

Ellie	Violet dropwing; waxbills, glossy ibis. Having beds made and meals cooked!
Mary	Ubiquitous wheatears; frogs; purple swamphen.
Chris A	Little owls; peregrine; Martin's tour of Trujillo; seeing so much of Extremadura.
Colin	Violet dropwing; golden eagle; talk on the 'three bridges'.
Jean	Dragonflies; swallowtail; Martin's tour of Trujillo.
Jill	Red deer; golden eagle; merendera and chicory; Martin's tour of Trujillo.
Anne	Swallows; the fun.
Diana	Azure-winged magpies; the tour of Trujillo; dragonflies.
David	Waxbill; little owl; dragonflies in general; Martin's tour of Trujillo was the cultural highlight.
Margaret	Peña Falcón with griffon vultures; flocks of azure-winged magpies flitting, feeding in companionship; glossy ibis.
Oliver	Great bustards and little bustards; being able to photograph swallowtail butterflies.
Christine	Tour of Trujillo; waxbill; views e.g. Monfragüe; peregrine.
Malcolm	Golden eagle; avadavats; little bustards; Martin's tour of Trujillo.
Helen	Seeing woodlark on the ground; golden eagle; dragons and damsels in the 'scope; Martin's knowledge; La Troya.
Martin	Golden eagle; glossy ibises (both out of the blue); lakeshore peregrine.
Chris D	That the holiday worked; dragonflies, colourful and numerous, especially the violet dropwing and banded groundling.

## WILDLIFE LISTS

BIRDS	
Little grebe	Seen on small water bodies as well as many on Alcollarín Reservoir on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Great crested grebe	Seen at Alcollarín and on Cabezuelas Lake north of Trujillo.
Cormorant	Seen most days on large water bodies and also a party flying over the steppes near Santa Marta de Magasca.
Cattle egret	Seen almost every day.
Little egret	Seen at Alcollarín reservoir, Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
Great white egret	Seen at Alcollarín reservoir, Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
Grey heron	Seen daily.
Purple heron	One seen by Oliver by a roadside pool on 29 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Squacco heron	One at Arrocampo on 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct.
Black stork	Three to five present at Alcollarín reservoir on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
White stork	One at Alcollarín and over a hundred seen on rice fields on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Glossy ibis	Twenty on rice fields near Palazuelo on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Spoonbill	About 30 at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Egyptian Goose	Several at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Gadwall	Seen at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Teal	Seen at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Mallard	Several hundred at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept. and seen most other days.
Pintail	About a hundred at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Shoveler	Seen at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Pochard	About two at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> September.
White-headed duck	A female or juvenile at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept., only the fifth record ever in Extremadura.
Red kite	Seen daily.
Griffon vulture	Seen daily.
Black vulture	Seen almost every day.
Marsh harrier	Seen almost daily.
Hen harrier	A male seen in Monfragüe on 29 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Sparrowhawk	Seen twice during the week.
Common buzzard	Seen daily.
Golden eagle	A juvenile over River Almonte on 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept. and a probable en route from Madrid on 27 <sup>th</sup> .
Bonelli's eagle	One in Monfragüe on 29 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Booted eagle	One seen briefly near Campo Lugar on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept. and one in Monfragüe on 29 <sup>th</sup> .
Common kestrel	Seen almost daily.
Peregrine	One at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept. and one in Monfragüe on 29 <sup>th</sup> .
Red-legged partridge	Seen twice during the week.
Water rail	Heard at Arrocampo on 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct.
Moorhen	Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
Purple gallinule	One at Arrocampo on 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct.
Coot	Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
Little bustard	17 near Palazuelo on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Great bustard	Four near Santa Marta de Magasca on 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct.
Black-winged stilt	Seen at Alcollarín and on the rice fields.
Little ringed plover	Seen at Alcollarín, Cabezuelas Lake and River Tamuja.
Ringed plover	Three or four at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Lapwing	Seen most days both on the plains and also close to water.
Little stint	One at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Dunlin	About five at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Ruff	Six on rice fields near Palazuelo on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Snipe	Seen at Alcollarín and the rice fields.
Spotted redshank	Two on rice fields near Palazuelo on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Redshank	Two at Alcollarín on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Greenshank	Seen at Alcollarín and on rice fields. One imitated by a spotless starling at Arrocampo.
Green sandpiper	Seen daily.
Wood sandpiper	One on rice fields near Palazuelo on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Common sandpiper	Seen at Alcollarín and on Cabezuelas Lake.
Black-headed gull	Seen almost daily.
Lesser black-backed gull	Seen at Alcollarín and on the rice fields.
Black-bellied sandgrouse	About 20 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct.
Pin-tailed sandgrouse	Sadly the only one was a recently dead bird, presumably victim of collision with a fence.
Rock dove/feral pigeon	Seen daily.
Woodpigeon	Seen in small numbers most days.
Collared dove	Seen daily.
Long-eared owl	Heard by Colin at Finca Santa Marta on 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Little owl	Superb views on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct. but also heard some nights at Finca Santa Marta.
Pallid swift	Several seen over Trujillo on 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
White-rumped swift	One adult and a nestling seen in Monfragüe on 29 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Kingfisher	Seen most days.
Hoopoe	Seen almost every day.
Green woodpecker	One seen by Helen at Finca Santa Marta on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept.



Great spotted woodpecker	Seen on two days at Finca Santa Marta.
Lesser spotted woodpecker	A male seen in Valdecañas valley on 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct.
Calandra lark	Seen on visits to plains on 28 <sup>th</sup> Sept. and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct.
Crested lark	Seen every day.
Thekla lark	Seen at Alcollarín and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
Woodlark	Seen and heard almost daily at Finca Santa Marta.
Sand martin	A party over Finca Santa Marta on 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept. and seen on rice fields on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Crag martin	Seen almost every day.
Barn swallow	Seen at Finca Santa Marta on 27 <sup>th</sup> Sept. and Moheda Alta on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Red-rumped swallow	Seen daily.
House martin	Seen daily.
Yellow wagtail	Seen almost every day.
Grey wagtail	One on Magasca River on 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct.
White wagtail	Seen most days.
Wren	Recorded most days at Finca Santa Marta.
Robin	Seen every day.
Bluethroat	Two or three at Arrocampo on 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct.
Black redstart	Seen most days.
Common redstart	Individual passage birds seen on three days.
Whinchat	Seen most days, especially on the plains.
Stonechat	Seen daily.
Northern wheatear	Large numbers on passage, especially on the plains.
Blue rock thrush	Seen in Monfragüe and towards the end of the week at Finca Santa Marta.
Blackbird	Seen daily.
Mistle thrush	Seen daily at Finca Santa Marta.
Pied flycatcher	Seen daily.
Spotted flycatcher	One seen by Magasca River on 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct.
Cetti's warbler	Heard (and sometimes seen) most days.
Fan-tailed warbler	Seen most days.
Reed warbler	Seen at Arrocampo on 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct.
Sardinian warbler	Seen daily.
Common whitethroat	Seen on 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Blackcap	Seen most days.
Willow warbler	Individuals seen on three days.
Chiffchaff	Seen on 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct.
Firecrest	Seen by Helen and Martin at Moheda Alta on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Long-tailed tit	Seen almost daily.
Crested tit	One seen at Monfragüe Castle on 29 <sup>th</sup> Oct.
Blue tit	Seen daily.
Great tit	Seen daily.
Penduline tit	One seen by Martin at Arrocampo on 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct.
Short-toed treecreeper	Seen almost every day.
Iberian grey shrike	Seen daily. One bird regularly present at entrance to the Finca.
Woodchat shrike	One seen from Chris's minibus on way down from Madrid on 27 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Jay	Seen on two days.
Azure-winged magpie	Seen daily.
Magpie	Seen daily.
Jackdaw	Seen on several days.
Raven	Seen daily.
Spotless starling	Seen daily.
House sparrow	Seen daily.
Spanish sparrow	Seen on two days – rather dowdy-looking at this time of the year.
Tree sparrow	Two seen on rice fields on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct.
Common waxbill	Seen at Alcollarín and on rice fields.
Red avadavat	Seen on rice fields on 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct. including males in full-breeding plumage.
Chaffinch	Seen daily.
Serin	One seen at Pago de San Clemente on 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct.
Goldfinch	Seen almost daily.
Linnet	Seen daily.
Hawfinch	Seen at Finca Santa Marta (nine at one time), as well as Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
Cirl bunting	One singing at Almonte River on 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept.
Corn bunting	Seen almost daily.

#### MAMMALS

Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i> (spraints)
Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus hispanicus</i>
Iberian hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>
Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Greater White-toothed Shrew	<i>Crocidura russula</i> (dead)

#### REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Spanish (stripe-necked) terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>
Large psammmodromus	<i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>
Iberian wall lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanica</i>
Moorish gecko	<i>Tarentola mauretanica</i>
Stripeless tree frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>
Iberian water frog	<i>Rana perezi</i>

BUTTERFLIES		
Swallowtail	Small tortoiseshell	Brown Argus
Scarce swallowtail	Meadow brown	Long-tailed blue
Bath white	Southern speckled wood	Lang's short-tailed blue
Orange-tip	Wall brown	Geranium bronze
Clouded yellow	Small Copper	African tiger blue
Red admiral	Holly Blue	Mallow skipper

DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES	
English names are the standardised names used in Europe plus, in several cases, a different name often used in the UK in brackets.	
Western Willow Spreadwing (Willow Emerald Damselfly)	<i>Chalcolestes viridis</i>
Iberian blue-tail	<i>Ischnura graellsii</i>
Small Bluetail (Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly)	<i>Ischnura pumilio</i>
Blue-eye (Goblet-marked Damselfly)	<i>Erythromma lindenii</i>
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>
Blue Emperor (Emperor Dragonfly)	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>
Epaulet Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum chrysostigma</i>
Long Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum trinacria</i>
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombi</i>
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>
Broad Scarlet (Scarlet Darter)	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>
Violet Dropwing (Violet-marked Darter)	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>
Banded Groundling	<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>

OTHER NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES	
Moth <i>Cymbalophora pudica</i> , Discrete Chaperon	Paper wasp <i>Polistes</i> sp.
Moth <i>Lasiocampa trifolii</i> , Grass Eggar	Violet carpenter bee
Praying mantis	Honey bee
Egyptian grasshopper/locust	Ichneumon wasp sp.
Blue-winged grasshopper	Robber fly <i>Asilus barbarus</i>
Red-winged grasshopper	Soldier fly larva, <i>Stratiomys longicornis</i> ?
Cicada sp. (heard)	Hornet mimic hoverfly <i>Volucella zonaria</i>
Ground bug <i>Spilostethus pandurus</i>	Lobed wasp spider <i>Argiope lobata</i>
Red-and-black shield bug <i>Graphosoma italicum</i>	Red-clawed crayfish (remains)



Top: Moorish gecko (OD); Discrete chaperon (JD);  
Grass eggar (HC); Praying mantis.  
Bottom: Hornet mimic hoverfly on sea squill;  
Iberian water frog; Robber fly (HC).





## PLANTS

Numbers on the right refer to Blamey & Grey-Wilson, *Mediterranean Wild Flowers*,  
from which family names are generally taken.

Where there is no number, sometimes these are plants in floras from northern Europe  
e.g. *Wild Flowers of Britain & Europe* by Fitter, Fitter & Blamey.

Others are aliens or more local species not in field guides.

NiF = not in flower. Fr = in fruit or seed. Planted trees, marked P, are noted when of special interest.

<b>Pinaceae</b>		
<i>Pinus pinea</i>	Stone / umbrella pine	3 P
<b>Fagaceae</b>		
<i>Quercus coccifera</i>	Kermes oak	24
<i>Quercus rotundifolia</i>	Holm oak	26
<i>Quercus suber</i>	Cork oak	27
<i>Quercus faginea</i>	Portuguese oak	27
<b>Ulmaceae</b>		
<i>Celtis australis</i>	Nettle-tree.	38
<b>Polygonaceae</b>		
<i>Polygonum persicaria</i>	Redshank	
<b>Nyctaginaceae</b>		
<i>Mirabilis jalapa</i>	Marvel of Peru, 4 o'clock flower	
<b>Phytolaccaceae</b>		
<i>Phytolacca acinosa</i>	Pokeweed	112
<b>Caryophyllaceae</b>		
<i>Dianthus lusitanus</i>		
<b>Crassulaceae</b>		
<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort	396 Fr
<b>Rosaceae</b>		
<i>Rosa canina</i>	Common dogrose	Fr
<b>Leguminosae</b>		
<i>Acacia dealbata</i>	'Mimosa' or Silver wattle	432 P
<i>Cercis siliquastrum</i>	Judas tree	430 P Fr
<i>Lygos monosperma</i>	Retama	480 Fr
<b>Euphorbiaceae</b>		
<i>Chrozophora tinctoria</i>	Turn-sole	822
<b>Anacardiaceae</b>		
<i>Pistacia terebinthus</i>	Turpentine tree, terebinth	861 Fr
<i>Pistacia lentiscus</i>	Mastic tree, lentisc	865 Fr
<b>Phyllanthaceae</b>		
<i>Flueggea (or Rhamnus) tinctoria</i>	Tamujo	NiF
<b>Thymelaeaceae</b>		
<i>Daphne gnidium</i>	Daphne	936
<b>Cistaceae</b>		
<i>Cistus albidus</i>	Grey-leaved cistus	961 NiF
<i>Cistus salviifolius</i>	Sage-leaved cistus	965 NiF
<i>Cistus ladanifer</i>	Gum cistus	971 NiF
<b>Cucurbitaceae</b>		
<i>Ecballium elaterium</i>	Squirting cucumber	1032
<i>Cucumis myriocarpus</i>	Paddy melon, gooseberry cucumber	
<b>Cactaceae</b>		
<i>Opuntia ficus-indica</i>	Prickly pear	1040
<b>Onagraceae</b>		
<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	Great willowherb	1065
<b>Umbelliferae</b>		
<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	Fennel	1108 NiF
<i>Ferula communis</i>	Giant fennel	1141 Fr
<i>Daucus carota</i>	Wild carrot	1168
<b>Ericaceae</b>		
<i>Arbutus unedo</i>	Strawberry tree	1176 Fr
<b>Lythraceae</b>		
<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	Purple loosestrife	
<b>Oleaceae</b>		
<i>Phillyrea angustifolia</i>	Phillyrea or false olive	1246 NiF
<i>Olea europaea</i>	Olive	1248 Fr
<i>Olea europaea</i> ssp. <i>oleaster</i>	Wild olive	1248a Fr
<i>Fraxinus angustifolia</i>	Narrow-leaved ash	
<b>Convolvulaceae</b>		
<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	Field bindweed	1334
<b>Boraginaceae</b>		
<i>Heliotropium europeum</i>	Heliotrope	1341
<i>Echium plantagineum</i>	Purple viper's bugloss	1383
<b>Boraginaceae</b>		
<i>Echium plantagineum</i>	Purple viper's bugloss	1383

<b>Verbenaceae</b>		
<i>Verbena officinalis</i>	Vervain	1418
<b>Labiatae</b>		
<i>Lavandula stoechas</i>	French lavender	1528 NiF
<i>Mentha</i> sp.	Horse-mint?	
<b>Solanaceae</b>		
<i>Hyosciamus albus</i>	White henbane	1555
<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Black nightshade	1563
<i>Datura stramonium</i>	Thorn-apple	1575 Fr
<b>Scrophularicaea</b>		
<i>Verbascum sinuatum</i>		1601
<b>Compositae</b>		
<i>Conyza canadensis</i>	Canadian fleabane	1803
<i>Dittricia viscosa</i>	Sticky inula	1842
<i>Xanthium spinosum</i>	Spiny cocklebur	1857
<i>Conyza canadensis</i>	Canadian fleabane	1803
<i>Carlina racemosa</i>		1923
<i>Galactites tomentosa</i>	Galactites	1971 Fr
<i>Silybum marianum</i>	Milk thistle	1982 Fr
<i>Tolpis barbata</i>	Tolpis	1842
<i>Mantisalca salmantica</i>		1988
<i>Chicorium intybus</i>	Chicory	2023
<i>Andryala integrifolia</i>		2081
<i>Helianthus</i> sp.	Perennial sunflower	
<b>Liliaceae</b>		
<i>Asparagus acutifolius</i>		2212 Fr
<i>Merendera filifolia</i>	Merendera	2132
<i>Urginea maritima</i>	Sea squill	2163
<i>Scilla autumnale</i>	Autumn squill	2189
<b>Agavaceae</b>		
<i>Agave americana</i>	Agave, century plant	2253
<b>Amaryllidaceae</b>		
<i>Leucojum autumnale</i>	Autumn snowflake	2263
<b>Gramineae</b>		
<i>Briza maxima</i>	Large quaking grass	2460
<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Bermuda grass	2481
<i>Arundo donax</i>	Giant reed	2494
<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	Lesser reedmace	
<i>Avena</i> sp.	Wild oats	



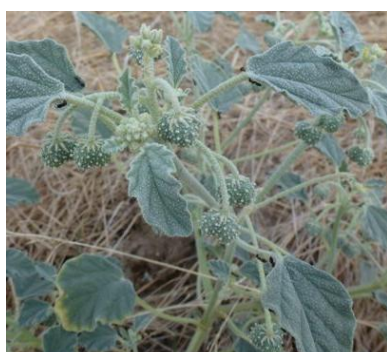
*Mantisalca salmantica*



*Carlina racemosa*



*Dianthus lusitanus*



Left: Turnsole *Chrozophora tinctoria*  
This plant, initially an ID puzzle, intrigued us with the reference in Blamey/Grey-Wilson to its being used as a dye. This is expanded on in <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turnsole> which also shows that Christine's thought that the name is derived from it moving towards the sun, like a sunflower, is correct.

Right: Autumn squill *Scilla autumnale*  
with autumn snowflake *Leucojum autumnale*

