



Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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SPRING IN THE SPANISH PYRENEES

24 APRIL – 3 MAY 2014

Participants

Peter and Elonwy Crook
David and Stephanie Bennett
Marie Watt

Leader

Chris Gibson

Our hosts: Melanie and Peter Rich at Casa Sarasa www.casasarasa.com

Photos by Chris Gibson, all taken during this holiday.

Front cover: Berdún and the high Pyrenees.

Below: lunch at La Virgen de la Peña.



This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed, in this case for La Sociedad Española de Ornitología (SEO), the Spanish Ornithological Society, and its work in Aragón. The conservation contribution this year of £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, leading to a total of £250 / €300. This donation brings the total given to SEO since the first Honeyguide holiday in Spain in 1991 to £15,885 (through all Honeyguide holidays, mostly the Spanish Pyrenees and Extremadura).

The total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 was £94,787 to May 2014.

Daily Diary

Thursday 24 April: The journey there...

Leaving behind the lovely English spring at Stansted with some trepidation given the latest Pyrenean weather forecast, we arrived in Biarritz in mid-afternoon (with a glimpse for some of a flock of gannets offshore as we lined up to land) – and the forecast wasn't wrong! It was raining, and clearly had been for some time. And the rain stayed with us as I collected the minibus, and set off down the motorway, at which point it got even heavier.... At least we got to see some dramatic cloudscapes, even though the skies were not darkened by soaring raptors. Although construction works for the motorway, which is due to extend right across northern Spain, had reached Yesa reservoir, thankfully for the moment (and given the current financial climate it may be a long moment) our immediate environs remained untouched. So it was to the tranquillity of Casa Sarasa we rolled up at 18.30 to be met by our welcoming hosts Peter and Melanie. Time to unpack, quickly ascertain that nightingales were around in force, competing for attention with numerous chattering house sparrows, before we sat down for the first of many exceptional meals. A glass or two of wine later, bedtime beckoned...

Friday 25 April: local walks around Berdún – Río Veral and Aragón Valley; Martés

Despite (or perhaps because of?) the insistent early morning serenade from the pesky nightingales, an almost full house for the pre-breakfast walk headed out in cloud and drizzle, and a cool, strong north-westerly breeze, the latter being a near-constant feature of our entire stay. Nevertheless, the walk introduced us to the common birds of the area – showy serins, spotless starlings, great tits, black redstarts and corn buntings, and a few tastes of summer, including a pair of northern wheatears, subalpine warblers and a willow warbler. A couple of Sardinian warblers appeared in the low scrub – although a common Mediterranean species, this area appears to be on the edge of their range, as we don't see them every year. Overhead five griffon vultures and two ravens were already on the wing, and close to the village, the verges abounded in henbane, its khaki-green flowers with deep purple centres and veins presenting a suitably funereal touch to such a poisonous plant.

After breakfast, with freshly-baked local bread and croissants, we got no further than the car park before the griffons rose up above the village in wave after wave, more than fifty in total, taking advantage of the updraughts from the wind hitting the hill. We drove up to the village for an orientation session, consisting of stops at each of the lookout points, necessarily brief because of the increasingly blustery wind making it very cool despite the welcome sunshine. The views were spectacular: up to the high Pyrenees (although the very high tops were shrouded in cloud), either way along the Canal de Berdún, and south to the Pre-Pyrenees, the Tolkeinesque triangular peak of Oroel rapidly becoming a familiar landmark. Although most of the vultures had moved on (or been blown away) by the time we reached the top, a few remained and were joined by black kites, a pale morph booted eagle and a couple of Egyptian vultures, over the rubbish dump.



Griffon vultures over Berdún.



Badlands in the Veral valley.

Walking slowly down onto the Badlands, the skeletal, eroded marl landscape was at first glance lifeless but far from the case in reality: bold splashes of yellow from Berdún broom and barberry; white-flowered snowy mespilus; pink shrubby thyme; and the bronze-tinged foliage of box. Between the shrubs, there were white rock-roses, red Montpellier milk-vetch, bright blue shrubby gromwell and acid-green serrated spurge, and lady orchids just coming into full flower, mostly gaining protection against browsing by growing in and around the spiny shrubs. The wind was keeping all small birds out of sight and earshot, but an unfamiliar yelping call drew our attention to a superb displaying booted eagle, although the object of its attentions never appeared.

But down by the Río Veral we at last found some shelter, in which some insect life revealed itself – wall brown, common heath moth, marmalade hoverfly and a paper wasp attending its nest.

We bumped into local artist Josie, whose father was one of the original owners of the Painting School in which Honeyguide used to stay, and she showed us the local drinking spring (with purple toothwort flowering beside it). Cetti's warblers, blackcaps and northern chiffchaffs were in song, and the surrounding bushes of fly honeysuckle were in full flower, with those of dogwood and wayfaring-tree about to undergo bud-burst. Then it was the long slog uphill back to Casa Sarasa, pausing only for beautiful flax, a scarce swallowtail and basking fire-bugs (in fact several species of black-and-red bug), though the prospect of lunch made it a relatively easy trek!

After lunch, a short drive then took us into the main Aragón valley, turning west on the north side of the river and heading on (reasonably) comfortable unmade tracks towards the confluence with the Veral. But immediately we drew to a halt as dark shapes scythed over the rushing waters. Two hobbies were making inroads into the local insect populations, catching and eating them on the wing, in a wonderful display of aerobatics, and even a couple of kingfisher flypasts were unable to unrivet our attention from the hobbies. Our main purpose of this route was to see if some of the special flowers were out, and we were not disappointed. Purple gromwell was a strikingly-blue feature of the shaded verges; wild tulips were just opening their starry yellow flowers further along; and the Lusitanian fritillaries on a Badlands spur were flowering with an abundance that I have never seen before. A scarce swallowtail performed admirably, resting in front of and on the photographers, and several iridescent green tiger-beetles scurried and flew out of our way as we walked along the old river bed gravels among the yellow ground-pine.



Wild tulips, *Tulipa sylvestris*.



Lusitanian fritillary.



Scarce swallowtail.

With a little time to spare, we then drove slowly across vast plains of arable cultivation, enlivened by many corn buntings and a few red-legged partridges, here in their natural home. A stop by a stream, with dragon's-teeth and blue aphyllanthes on the bank and Iberian water frogs calling, proved very fortuitous when Peter noticed a large shape quartering the scrubby hill slopes, with barely a twitch of the wing. Though just how big only became apparent through binoculars when one realised the 'bushes' were in fact trees – yes, it was a lammergeier, in all its 3-metre-wingspan glory, a superb view of a near-adult bird.

Finally, we drove up to the 'Council depot' next to the former tip, a useful parking area for a short walk onto a superbly floriferous section of Badlands, with sombre bee-orchid, Pyrenean spurge and sad stock, all framing the most glorious sunny views across the Canal to Berdún – the photos don't do justice to the persistent cool wind!

Saturday 26 April: Santa Cruz de la Serós, San Juan de la Peña and Berdún Marsh

Despite a forecast of sun and wind, the day dawned wet and calm! It took us several days to get on top of the variance between predicted and actual weather. In reality the only way was to prepare for anything every day...

We headed back down to the Aragón before breakfast, getting great views of numerous rock sparrows on the bridge and a pair of grey herons on the gravelly banks. Moving into the poplar plantation, a stunning male redstart proved the main prize, while a wryneck broke into 'song' rather distantly.

Our first destination of the main part of the day was the historic village of Santa Cruz de la Serós, at the foot of La Peña. From the village, griffon vulture nests could be picked out on the towering cliffs, although given the drizzle and low cloud it was not surprising that few of them were flying. Crag martins have taken full advantage of the external niches on the church, and the owners of the nests were feeding in their almost swift-like manner overhead. A short walk up the hill soon produced some new plants: patches of blue and white hepaticas (with just a few pink ones) rather past their best; cowslips and possible hybrids with other *Primula* species; bold splashes of blue milkwort; and pines which were very heavily infested with mistletoe, in its conifer-parasitising subspecies *austriaca*.

We were passing a patch of cream-flowered comfrey when the sun broke through for a short while and immediately the insects sprang into action, one particularly smart orange bumblebee being identified as probably a well-coloured subspecies (there are many!) of the common carder-bee. Everywhere there was the trilling song of Bonelli's warblers: normally reluctant to show themselves, one male in particular put on a whole-body shivering show, displaying its subtly beautiful grey and yellow plumage to all. But a singing male orphee warbler very close to the track was not so obliging, and all we managed to see were a few fleeting glimpses.

As the drizzle had now restarted, we opted for a coffee break in a local bar, before returning to the bus and heading uphill. A brief stop at the viewpoint should have given tremendous views across to the high Pyrenees, usefully interpreted (in understandable Spanish) on the geological trail boards provided. However, as we were now in the cloud, the drizzle had turned to rain, the breeze was gathering strength and it became a very brief stop. Ever onward and upward, we drove then to the car park by the new monastery at the top, where at least the conifer woodland provided some shelter. Shelter, but not many birds – coal tits, robins and goldcrests were in song, but everything else was pretty subdued, so we took a stroll across the plateau grassland, admiring the grape-hyacinths on the way, through the woods, with carpets of hepatica and violets, and out to the ruined hermitage of St Teresa. Although again the views were far from spectacular due to the low cloud, the flowers were simply stunning, the open grassland completely clothed in the dainty scented flowers of rock daffodil, interspersed with a few elder-flowered orchids.

By now we were ready for lunch, and we were not going to let the damp put us off, so we colonised one of the picnic tables and tucked in. A great spotted woodpecker soon joined in, watching from a nearby table, and then just as we were about to pile into the bus and leave, a small group of crested tits hove into view above us, one of which managed to make itself seen by everyone.

With no sign of an improvement in the weather, we decided to drive (if only for the sake of the occupants' afternoon nap!) along the back of La Peña, and eventually home via Jaca. Diverting briefly off the tarmac road to Berdún Marsh, we were soon immersed in the resounding song of nightingales and Cetti's warblers, although it seemed the expected golden orioles had not yet arrived. A wryneck was calling in the distance, and we managed to track it down to the very bush it was singing from. But still we couldn't see it! The final drive along the track towards home allowed us good views of corn buntings, crested larks and serins, and a little owl perched atop a broken-down barn. By now the clouds were growing ever darker, with heavy drizzle whipped by a rising wind, and the prospect of good food, drink and shelter was hugely appealing...

Sunday 27 April: Arbayún, Lumbier and Yesa

In contrast, the next day dawned bright and sunny, with scattered cloud, and still a keen wind. But it was cold, just 5°C as we headed back to the marsh for our pre-breakfast ramble. Well, more of an amble actually, as once we were parked we could hear yesterday's wryneck, calling from a slightly different position. Patience paid off: eventually we pinned it down, and all managed to get good 'scope views of its wonderfully cryptic plumage. Then while we were enjoying that, a static crackle started up from the marsh, modulating in tone with a throbbing and ventriloquial quality. It was a singing Savi's warbler, presumably a bird on migration as the marsh is on the small side, and it is not known to breed in this part of Spain.

We headed west after breakfast, taking advantage of the new motorway where possible, along the banks of Yesa Reservoir. The milky blue waters were typically devoid of birds but provided a scenic backdrop to our drive to Arbayún. This magnificent limestone gorge is not accessible, apart from visually from the cantilevered viewing platform at its head, and the lack of disturbance means it is one of the best places in the area to watch raptors, from below, above and eye-to-eye. Imagine my disappointment then when we arrived – the skies were empty, and apart from a couple of disconsolate griffons and Egyptian vultures, so too were the cliffs. But at last the weather played ball and the sun came out. The results were almost instantaneous with griffons appearing from nowhere, red and black kites, and then single booted and short-toed eagles for good measure. A singing male circling bunting posed well and parties of migrating alpine swifts started to hurtle through every few minutes.

At Lumbier Gorge, the weather had stepped up a gear, from warm to hot, and with it out came the crowds, not surprising for one of the first summery Sundays of the year. Notwithstanding the crowds, birds were still much in evidence, protected from the masses by the inaccessibility of the gorge walls, and no doubt to some extent habituated to disturbance at this justifiably popular site. Crag martins flittered around the rock faces, choughs called incessantly and floated buoyantly around, and of course we were followed every inch of the way by griffons, drifting overhead or perched on the cliff edges and ledges. Mediterranean buckthorn, as usual, was in a confusing mix of stages, from buds to ripe fruit, while St Lucie's cherry had just finished flowering, and spindle just started. The latter two species often came festooned with the silken webs of their respective small ermine micromoth caterpillars. In fact, the whole gorge was bursting into flower, with wild jasmine, snapdragon, kidney-vetch and little-robin, naturally attracting various insects, including a smart bloody-nosed beetle, and several butterflies – Cleopatra, brimstone, southern speckled wood, and orange-tip for example. Flowering and insect life were at their most abundant just at the exit from the second tunnel, where the rock faces have a southerly aspect and act as one giant solar reflector – walking through that tunnel was like advancing by two weeks.

Kermes oak was particularly noticeable here, rather than the more familiar, less-Mediterranean holm oak, although its identity is not always obvious from its shrubby habit, holly-like leaves, and the red berry-like galls of a bug *Coccus ilicis* which were very numerous on some plants. A (hungry) meadow tick on a spurge leaf looked beautiful in close up, though at the same time repellent, especially for those like me who have experienced Lyme disease...

Lunchtime again! And again a suitable picnic site, with tables. The quality (and quantity) of food needs no further comment as it was consistently outstanding throughout the trip.

A little patch of grassland and woodland next to Yesa Reservoir was our destination for the afternoon, and with the weather remaining warm and sunny, it proved excellent for insects and flowers. Several species of *Ophrys* orchid were encountered, including sombre bee, yellow bee, early spider and mirror orchids, while the lepidopteran delights included narrow-bordered bee-hawk and four-spotted moths and common blue, brown argus and violet fritillary butterflies. A red-thighed grasshopper *Calliptamus italicus* remained stationary despite the close attentions of the photographers, but the real stars were the Spanish festoons, clearly freshly emerged, and very happily allowing us extended views of what can be a very flighty butterfly.



Mirror orchid.



Yellow bee orchid.



Spanish festoon.

Another off-piste adventure on the final leg home took us onto the old airfield, and a fine collection of Champagne orchids (a close relative – or maybe variety – of our green-winged orchid), together with the glorious sight of hot Badlands slopes turning pink under shrubby rest-harrow.

Monday 28 April: Portalet to Formigal; Río Aragón

Dawn broke with scattered cloud in the lowlands, presenting the pre-breakfast crew with the wonderful sight of the first rays of sun stealing across the Badlands landscape, the low angle casting long shadows from every bush, rock and runnel. A snatch of (not very) melodious warbler song suggested a new arrival, and both black and red kites were up and about early. Migrating parties of swallows were moving through, heading into the still keen wind, and a tassel hyacinth had burst into flower since our previous walk there three days ago. But up in the high mountains to the west, it looked very murky, leading to a rethink of my planned itinerary for the day.

So instead we headed east, to Sabiñanigo and thereafter up to the border crossing at Portalet. Up the road, the high level reservoirs were typically birdless, but a short stop there gave us some splendid views of the mountains, albeit partly enveloped in cloud, and the bizarre sight of a cormorant flying high overhead, down the valley to presumably better feeding grounds in the lowlands.

Higher and ever higher, towards Formigal, then Portalet, was like peeling back the seasons: early summer in the lowlands, to the very first inkling of spring at five thousand feet, with snow lying thickly all around us, and at the top it started to snow, at times quite heavily. A coffee and retail therapy stop was in order, before we ventured out into the weather, unable to see anything apart from a few splashes of colour on the vertical rocks in the form of the earliest of all spring flowers, purple mountain saxifrage. Red-billed choughs called from the cloud-blanketed rock faces, and swallows were still moving in some numbers, small groups heading over the pass, skimming the ground as they approached the watershed. A hobby did likewise – presumably it could have had rich pickings among the tired swallows, but it was more intent on migrating. And then, remarkably, the same migratory path was followed by a high-flying group of 16 lesser black-backed gulls (mostly immatures and sub-adults), a quite incongruous sight.

Moving gradually downhill, our first stop was in the huge empty car park for the ski facilities. A skylark sang in the snow, and northern wheatears were active by the snowmelt streams, along with several water pipits, one of which posed perfectly on a head of cleared snow, showing its subtly beautiful plumage to perfection.



Water pipit.



The slopes below Portalet.

It isn't often that 'beautiful' is used in the same sentence as 'pipit'! A little further down, a vantage point among the wild daffodils was ideally placed to watch a splendid male rock thrush, typically perched atop a jumble of boulders. And Steph, in an attempt to get closer to the daffodils, drew our attention to several bundles of fur waddling across the slopes – alpine marmots, no doubt just emerged from hibernation. Indeed, after a short while a number of the prominent 'rocks' started to move and whistle, as the marmots set about establishing territories while keeping watch for hungry predators. With good reason, it turned out, as an immature golden eagle swept along the opposite slopes, its wingtips almost brushing the ground. Still further down, spring was more advanced, and even in the overcast conditions, the spring gentians were blooming profusely, their intense blue complementing the yellow kingcups, orange-yellow Gouan's buttercups, and elder-flowered orchids of both cream and purple colour forms. However, spring clearly still had some way to go: rock buckthorn was still to come into leaf, its bare twigs closely adpressed to the south-facing rocks, trying gecko-like to get the maximum heat from this extreme environment.

Our final mountain stop was at Escarrilla, a short side valley providing at least a modicum of shelter from the increasingly cool and blustery wind, where we could enjoy our al fresco lunch. At least the hummingbird hawk-moth visiting dandelion flowers must have thought so! Then a short potter around the valley in which I have seen wallcreeper in the past. Alas not this year though, but the dramatic slate geology (covered in the non-flowering rosettes of Pyrenean saxifrage), numerous orange-tips, and a vertical, dripping wall of large-flowered butterwort in bloom were some compensation.

Back in the lowlands with time to spare we decided to head down to the Aragón again, to walk the southern banks and stabilised river shingles on the off chance that the breeding bee-eaters had arrived. It was not to be, but sudden and dramatic passages of common and alpine swifts suggested that the migratory urge was overriding the adverse winds. And the two hobbies were still at it, hawking over the rushing waters, while Marie's sharp eyes picked out the tiny orange discs of the eyelash fungus growing on the ground.

In the evening, we were treated to a visit and talk from Luis Tirado, the regional officer of SEO Aragón, the recipients of this trip's donation. As always with those who benefit from Honeyguide visits, he was entertaining, informative and simply excellent, as well as inordinately grateful for our support. In the UK we become accustomed to major NGOs being well-funded, largely through their vast base of supporters, but on the continent, well that is all too often not the case. And to the shame of all other tour companies, Honeyguide is still the only one which regularly supports conservation in the places we visit and get so much out of... And just to prove that the grapevine works well abroad as well as at home, Luis had already heard about our Savi's warbler the previous morning!

Tuesday 29 April: Alastuey Valley, Santa Cilia, La Virgen de la Peña; Biniés Gorge

Another cool night, but the early starters were rewarded with yet more signs of birds moving. As we arrived at the Aragón bridge at first light, we caught an exciting few minutes of waterbirds heading down the river valley. In total, some ten grey herons, four little egrets and 14 cormorants headed over us in just a few minutes, though whether this represented true migration or just local roost dispersal is unclear. Otherwise, the rock sparrows were present in noisy force, and a little ringed plover showed well on a gravel shoal.

In an addition to the usual Honeyguide itinerary, we decided to take in the nearest vulture feeding station, near Santa Cilia in the foothills of La Peña, as a delivery was expected at around 11am. While waiting for the appointed time, we drove to Bailo (as always, getting lost in the side streets!), and thence to Alastuey, through a side valley of the Canal de Berdún. Attractive scenery abounded, enriched by the warming sun, and at one particular stop a tawny pipit 'sang' for us on a prominent box bush.

Then it was off into the hills on the unmade forest roads, and after a bumpy ride (and even more interesting parking experience) arrived at the feeding station. Other birders were already there, and indeed so were the vultures, with at least 160 circling above us. We made our way out to the hide, introduced ourselves to the local birders, and waited for lunch to arrive. And waited. And waited ... assuming that the carcass would arrive Spanish-style sometime, if not on time. But the vultures thought otherwise, and we were surprised when the skies above us cleared. Then and only then did our friends get the phone call – the delivery was off...leaving us wondering how the vultures could possibly have known before we did through the marvels of modern technology. But all was not lost, as outside the hide we found tuberous meadow-rue, burnt orchid and several pristine fly orchids blooming, and as we wandered back to the van, everyone managed good views of a green hairstreak, at least once they could find it at rest.

On the recommendation of Peter and Mel, we then headed further up the forest roads to the picnic site at La Virgen de la Peña. Perhaps their assessment of the capabilities of the minibus (or my driving) was a little ambitious, but it proved to be an 'interesting' journey, particularly the steep, loose last couple of hundred metres to the car park.... Anyway, we made it, and after watching a narrow-bordered bee hawk-moth flying around our feet, headed off on the waymarked trail towards the isolated white chapel, built into the rock walls below the summit of La Peña. What a lovely walk it proved to be, with butterflies everywhere in the very pleasant sunshine, including Cleopatra and Duke-of-Burgundy. Where the path enters open rocky clearings, with hot south-facing slopes covered in stonecrops, this looks an ideal spot later in the summer for the majestic Apollo. Bird-wise, the woods were full of song – great tits, chaffinches and Bonelli's warblers especially – while a black woodpecker could be heard (but not seen) demolishing a rotten tree down the slope, and a very noisy peregrine wheeled around the cliff tops. And then the picnic site made an ideal lunch site, under the shade of a wild service-tree, the temperature now having risen to 20°C and driven Peter and myself into shorts.



Biniés Gorge, where a bryony ladybird was found on white bryony.

For the afternoon, we then headed out (via a splendid short-toed eagle hovering over a Badlands slope) to the nearby Foz de Biniés, where I left the group, before moving the van down to the bottom of the gorge. By the time we regrouped in mid-gorge, they had seen numerous griffon vultures low overhead, including several on nest ledges, as well as grey wagtails. But no dippers in the river; once a very reliable site for this species, the population in the gorge seems to have declined substantially in recent years, much as it has in the uplands of Britain. The rosettes of *Ramonda*, clinging to the north face of a large rock, were showing no signs of flowering, nor indeed most of the rosettes of Pyrenean saxifrage, and the patches of yellow garlic were still in bud, pregnant with the promise of golden stars in a few days' time. But some of the botanical specialities were flowering well, including rock petrocotilis, rock soapwort, Nottingham catchfly, Pyrenean hyacinth, bedstraw broomrape, bastard-balm and large Mediterranean spurge.

In the sheltered sunny stretches, butterflies abounded, with both brimstone and Cleopatra, and other insects and invertebrates provided interest every step of the way. We saw bryony ladybird (where it should be, on white bryony, which was helpfully growing alongside the unrelated black bryony for comparison and contrast), shield bugs, a crab spider eating a bee, and a giant, almost shrimp-like, bristletail.

But the lingering memory of the gorge is its geology, and the evidence it provides of the Pyrenees' turbulent past. Fault lines in the cliffs; the carpet folds of stratified rocks, sometimes through nearly 180°; the dramatic dolerite sills injected through the landscape, running counter to the underlying strata – all tell tales of continental collisions, the birth of a mountain chain, and its subsequent modification through erosion, seismic events and volcanism.

Wednesday 30 April: Hecho Valley, to Selva de Oza; Aragón Valley



The upper Hecho valley.

Another windy start, so we headed before breakfast down to the marsh, to try and find some shelter. And wherever a little shelter was to be found, we came up with new migrant birds, including grasshopper warbler, olivaceous warbler and several sedge warblers. The wryneck was in its usual area, and singing much more prominently than on previous days. Mindful of the dodgy forecast for the rest of the week (not that we believed in forecasts any more!), another re-jig of the planned programme saw us heading, via a refuelling stop, up the Hecho Valley, and through the dramatic rocky gorge, the Boca de lo Inferno (the aptly-named Hell's Mouth). We stopped first at a reported site for Pyrenean desman, but (as ever) no sign, although there was a dipper in the river and goldcrests in the fir trees. Green hellebore was just past flowering, and both yellow and wood anemones provided colour to the woodland floor. Onwards, beyond

Selva, we headed through mixed natural forest into the open vistas of the upper valley. The scenery in the high valley was stupendous, further enhanced by stonechats and yellowhammers taking advantage of the few bushes (including red-berried elder just coming into flower), and a lammergeier patrolling the skyline cliffs and screes. We parked in the top-most car park, deep into the heart of the mountains, and almost immediately noticed a couple of isards gambolling around the valley bottom. We watched for several minutes, before they sloped off uphill and joined the rest of the herd, maybe 14 in all, which had been grazing unobtrusively all the time. As we walked up the track, marsh tits put in an appearance and a crested tit was tugging at a lichen-encrusted rock, presumably trying to collect lining for its nest. This high up the flowers were few and far between, but included some dramatic blue patches of spring gentian, and the rather less showy, but still delightful, *Corydalis solidida*.

A huge group of alpine choughs rose over the mountainside, some 150 in all, producing all sorts of whistles and trills, quite different from their red-billed cousins feeding on invertebrates across the river. But for some, including me, one of the holiday highlights came on our walk back to the bus, when Steph pointed out an unfamiliar poo on the path at our feet. It was huge,



Spring gentians and *Corydalis solidida*.

12cm or so long, thickly cylindrical, and stuffed full of plant fibres. After due deliberation we realised it could only have come from a brown bear – the area is used by a small number of wanderers from the reintroduction scheme in France – and it was certainly very fresh.

We adjourned for lunch in the picnic site on the edge of the forest, a truly dramatic location overlooking cliffs with drifts of wild daffodils perched on every substantial ledge. Then a short walk through the woods produced a good range of common birds, mostly heard only, together with our first early purple orchids of the trip. But the real excitement came again from excrement, this time horse droppings on the road which were being devoured with relish by hordes of dung beetles, which eventually proved to be the Pyrenean dor beetle *Geotrupes pyrenaeus*. The drive back took us once more through the drama of Hell's Mouth, thence down to our usual stamping grounds on the banks of the Aragón. Here, swifts were still passing through in force, and at least two singing Iberian chiffchaffs allowed us to compare their distinctive, more irregular and less onomatopoeic songs with the northern chiffchaffs we had been hearing thus far. A clump of sword-leaved helleborines in flower added to our orchid list, and a black-headed gull resting in the middle of the river was a new bird, both for the trip and for me in this location, while a couple of common sandpipers fed busily along the stony banks.

Back at Casa Sarasa, both Peter and myself were independently treated to the sight and sound of a flock of eight bee-eaters flying low overhead, raising our hopes that the stopper had finally been removed from the migration bottleneck, notwithstanding the fact that the adverse wind was still apparent.

Thursday 1 May: Ansó valley to Linza; Roncal and Belagua, to San Martin; Fago Gorge

A welcome clear and calm start saw us once again down by the Aragón, where the usual suspects – grey herons, little egrets, yellow-legged gulls, common sandpipers and little ringed plovers – were all performing. A stunning male pied flycatcher in the poplar plantation suggested that the promise of the previous evening may be being realised.

Heading back to the high mountains, we progressed through Biniés Gorge and into the Ansó valley. Reaching the upper valley, in a short stop to survey the scene, a singing orphean warbler proved impossible to see clearly, although a chequered blue butterfly was much more obliging. We didn't look into the vulture restaurant above Ansó – although it was feeding day, it had been suggested that being May Day, a delivery would be unlikely, and the lack of birds hanging overhead suggested this was indeed the case. Then it was up to the head of the valley, through Zuriza, arriving eventually at the refuge at Linza. After a welcome coffee stop amidst the 'interesting' décor (is naked mountaineering really a recognised – and sensible – pastime?!) a walk into the beech woods was in order. Ringing with bird song, mistle thrush was a new bird for the week, and no sooner had I suggested that woods at this altitude could be suitable for common treecreeper, a treecreeper duly appeared. And then it sang, and revealed itself as a short-toed... The forest floor was bursting into flower, with purple toothwort and seven-leaved bittercress, and most dramatically drifts of Pyrenean squill, presenting an aspect not dissimilar to the bluebell woods black home, one of the most obvious differences being the beard lichens which festooned the branches of the trees, indicative of the lack of air pollution in this area.



Decorating the forest floor:
Pyrenean squill and purple toothwort.

And so to lunch, taken at a convenient stopping point on the forest road between Zuriza and Isaba. Although most attention was on the delightful spread, we did lift our eyes long enough to see a stack of griffons above, and having seated himself away from the noise of the tumbling stream, Peter managed to pick up a couple of crossbills flying over.

Then it was back to the hairpins, over into the Roncal-Belagua valley, and then up to the (unmarked) border crossing at San Martin. Unfortunately, we were by now in thick cloud and heavy rain, and the vast, dramatic landscape could only be imagined, so we didn't linger. Instead we headed back down the hairpins, down the Roncal valley, and over to Fago (during which we encountered our only hoopoe of the trip), and to the dramatic viewpoint overlooking the gorge. Griffons sailed around, and just as we were about to leave, an adult golden eagle swept past over the mountainside. But sadly, and surprisingly, no amount of searching could produce a blue rock thrush on a pinnacle – for some reason, they seemed few and far between this year.

The final passage down the Fago Gorge to Berdún completed a wonderful day of hairpins, gorges, weather and wildlife!

Friday 2 May: Santa Cruz; Peña Reservoir; Riglos; Aragón Valley

Overnight the wind got even stronger and colder, and as dawn broke there was evidently a lot of rain around, particularly to the west. Fortunately, that is where it stayed for most of the day. We headed down to Berdún Marsh for a final pre-breakfast birdwatch, and we were not disappointed. In just five minutes, five new migrants for the holiday put in appearance, again with purposefully-moving flocks of swallows. A yellow wagtail and two turtle doves headed over us, single garden warbler and spotted flycatchers were feeding among the willows and poplars, and at last the call of a golden oriole rang out in the early morning air. David spotted it perched on a skyline bush on the distant Badlands slope, before it swept gracefully into its more familiar habitat, the poplar plantation. As we returned for breakfast, our familiar little owl was standing sentinel on its favoured tumbledown barns.

In an addition to our planned itinerary, Peter and Mel had arranged for us to visit the home of their friends in Santa Cruz, friends who regularly report large moths attracted to their outside lights. Sadly we were probably too early for the main emergence of one highly desirable species, the Spanish moon moth, but the lights came up trumps with four giant peacock moths, along with several smaller species including dagger, early thorn, Hebrew character and white-point.

On with the planned day, to the southernmost reaches of the pre-Pyrenean range, the first stop was next to the Peña Reservoir. It was cold, with a strong wind and heavy cloud as we crossed the reservoir on a wobbly concrete slab bridge, and water birds were restricted to a very distant great-crested grebe. Greater yellow-rattle was flowering well in the meadow on the far shore, and out of the wind, a burnet companion moth put in an appearance.



Giant peacock moth.

Then a short drive to the dam, across which we made our way to pay homage to a veritable rock garden, covered in saxifrages and other plants, including some superb flowering examples of Pyrenean saxifrage and the iconic Pyrenean endemic *Ramonda*. Then it was eyes skyward as a lovely pale short-toed eagle circled overhead, harried by a yellow-legged gull, both set off against what was now a deep blue sky. And an abiding multi-sensory image was the powerful spout of water issuing from the hydroelectric plant, and the rainbow it created as spray rose from the rocks below.



Pyrenean saxifrage.



Short-toed eagle.

Passing then through the dramatic rock formations which mark the last bastion of the Pyrenees, we entered an area of lower-lying land, with agriculture, olives and gentle relief – the start of the Ebro Basin. Fortunately close to a point I could park safely, I spotted a flock of bee-eaters on the roadside wires, and we were all treated to a few minutes' display of the aerial mastery of these flying jewels. And as it was now lunchtime, and our parking spot was in a relatively sheltered olive grove, it seemed the ideal spot to picnic. The scrub community around us was markedly different from those we had seen hitherto, with a dominance of rosemary, kermes oak and turpentine bush, indicating we had entered the Mediterranean zone proper. Likewise, the rose garlic and Cantabrian bindweed on the road verge represented two plants we had not seen previously.

From there to Riglos, its economy apparently intimately linked with Los Mallos, a series of hugely impressive red conglomerate cliffs with the village nestled at the bottom of them. Walkers, birders, climbers and sightseers were in evidence everywhere, though it has to be said the same did not apply to the birds. Yes, there were griffons around, and some evidence of nests on the cliffs, but to judge from the well-worn climbing trails there are few parts of the cliffs closest to the village which do not suffer from considerable disturbance. Of course, another factor in the lack of vultures was probably the high winds. We perhaps were not aware of just how strong they were until we turned into the natural amphitheatre and almost literally blown off our collective feet: H&S considerations at that point dictated we turn back! As well as a refreshment break, the potter back through Riglos produced fleeting views of nettle-tree butterfly among the nettle-tree groves, blue scarlet pimpernel, a sheltering Egyptian locust and an impressive large green spider *Micrommata virescens*.

If yesterday had been characterised as a day of gorges, valleys and hairpins, perhaps the theme of this day had been the immense power of nature – the geological processes which created and deformed the Pre-Pyrenees into their majestic form; the power of water which eroded them into the shapes we now see, and which was so obvious at the dam; and the power of wind which could quite easily have seen us merging with the landscape a little too closely.



Los Mallos at Riglos.

With a little time in hand, we visited the Aragón again before returning home. Alas no bee-eaters, but a female pied flycatcher was good to see, and a chiffchaff was good to hear. Although in the same place as the Iberian chiffchaff a couple of days ago, and northern chiffchaff at the start of the holiday, this was clearly different to either. Intermediate in song in many ways, this was a so-called 'mixed singer', the true identity of which is still open to debate. A hybrid? Or an example of one or other species mimicking elements of the song of the other?

And so back to Casa Sarasa before settling down for our last, excellent meal and a review of the past few days of wildlife and landscape delights.

Saturday 3 May: the way home...

Given the revised flight time, we had a more leisurely start than originally anticipated. Time to pack after breakfast, load the minibus and bid farewell to Peter and Mel, the dogs and Berdún (with griffon vultures overhead) by 11.00, and that still gave us a brief opportunity to explore a Badlands valley which was previously unknown to me, where Peter had 'the nightingale experience of all time' while walking the dogs that morning. And what a lovely sight and sound: numerous nightingales in song, along with several melodious warblers and curl buntings....surely one to explore on the next trip!

And so homewards. It was all very pleasant at first, with bright sunshine as far as Pamplona, but then as the motorway weaved its way through the mountains, the cloud bubbled up and soon we were in it, in torrential rain and severely limited visibility. Not what you want with a plane to catch! However, we got through it, unscathed and on schedule, with even enough time to eat our picnic in the open air rather than in the airport.

The Best Bits

As is customary on a Honeyguide trip I asked the group to tell me their favourite parts and sightings of the trip:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Marie | Griffon vultures rising majestically over Berdún on the first morning; the enchanting globularias, almost wherever we went; the fantastic scenery and drives; and of course (shared by everyone) the food and hospitality at Casa Sarasa. |
| Peter | Aerobatic perfection: the hobbies over the river; ranks of daffodils flowering on the Hecho valley cliffs; the giant peacocks; and the intimacy of Biniés Gorge. |
| Elonwy | Our day touring the gorges and valleys (and hairpins!); gentians, such a rich colour in the turf; and Spanish festoons at Yesa, beautiful and co-operative. |
| David | That first sight of griffons 'in our back yard'; Biniés Gorge again (interesting this, it seems to have shown itself in a very good light this year); and the sights and sounds of migration as it happens. |
| Steph | Griffons again, but this time the larger number waiting (in vain) to be fed; flowers in abundance, including such delights as the wild tulips; and the undoubted winner – her bear poo. |

For my part, the real highlights have largely all been taken by others (including the bear poo – one of the most exciting things I have seen for a long time!), but to continue on a scatological theme, the dung beetles demolishing the horse deposits. Where had they all come from? And at the risk of eclipsing the rest of our food, the best pea soup I have ever had the privilege of wrapping myself around – a texture like liquid silk, and unsurpassable freshness and fragrance.

By common consensus, one of the highlights of every day was the mealtimes, and the delights, always fresh and tasty, we were served by Melanie and Peter (despite our diverse range of dietary constraints), which completed the perfect triumvirate of wildlife, weather and food!

My thanks to all involved in what was another outstanding Honeyguide trip, which I feel privileged to have led.

SYSTEMATIC LISTS

KEY TO LOCALITIES

In the following lists, specific locality codes are given only for the more interesting species found in a small number of localities. Otherwise if any code is given, it is the generalised zone code.

Especially for the plants, the list below concentrates on those seen in flower, with just a few more distinctive non-flowering species.

Canal de Berdún (CB)

B – Berdún, including the banks of the Veral and Berdún Marsh

Ar – Río Aragón, between Puente la Reina and the confluence with the Veral

Y – Yesa Reservoir

Lower gorges (LG)

Bi – Biniés gorge

Fa – Fago gorge

L – Lumbier and Arbayún gorges

Pre-Pyrenees (PP)

J – San Juan de la Peña and Santa Cruz de la Seros

V – Virgen de la Peña

R – Riglos and the 'Ramonda rock'

High Pyrenees (HP)

P – Portalet and Formigal

E – Escarilla

H – Hecho Valley

SM – San Martin and Belagua

An – Upper Ansó Valley

BRYOPHYTES (Mosses)

Grimmia pulvinuta

PTERIDOPHYTES (Ferns)

Asplenium adiantum-nigrum

Black Spleenwort

Bi

A. ruta-muraria

Wall-rue

B Bi

A. trichomanes

Maidenhair Spleenwort

Bi

Ceterach officinarum

Rustyback Fern

B Bi

Polypodium interjectum

Intermediate Polypody

Bi L

P. vulgare

Common Polypody

Bi

Pteridium aquilinum

Bracken

J

GYMNOSPERMS (Conifers)

Abies alba

Silver Fir

HP

Cupressus sempervirens

Cypress

R

Juniperus communis

Juniper

CB PP

J. communis ssp. *nana*

Alpine Juniper

HP

Pinus nigra

Black Pine

PP HP

P. sylvestris

Scots Pine

PP HP

P. uncinata

Mountain Pine

SM

Taxus baccata

Yew

Bi

DICOTYLEDONS

Aceraceae

Maple Family

Acer campestre

Field Maple

A. monspessulanum

Montpelier Maple

Bi

A. opalus

Bi

Anacardiaceae

Pistachio Family

Pistachia lentiscus

Lentisc

LG

P. terebinthus

Turpentine Bush

R

Apiaceae

Carrot Family

Bupleurum rigidum

Field Eryngo

Bi Ar

Eryngium campestre

Fennel

B

Foeniculum vulgare

Shepherd's-needle

Scandix pecten-veneris

Holly Family

Aquifoliaceae

Holly

Ilex aquifolium

Ivy

Araliaceae

Ivy Family

Hedera helix

Irish Ivy

Bi

H. hibernica

Daisy Family

Asteraceae

Wormwood

B

Artemisia absinthium

Field Southernwood

Ar

A. campestre

Daisy

Bellis perennis

Slender thistle

Carduus tenuiflorus

Red Star-thistle

Centaurea calcitrapa

CB

Helichrysum stoechas

<i>Lactuca perennis</i>	Blue Lettuce	L
<i>Onopordon acanthium</i>	Scotch Thistle	
<i>Pallenis spinosa</i>	Spiny Fleabane	R
<i>Rhagadiolus stellatus</i>		R
<i>Santolina chamaecyparissus</i>	Lavender Cotton	CB
<i>Silybum marianum</i>	Milk Thistle	B
<i>Taraxacum</i> sp.	Dandelion	HP
<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	Colt's-foot	HP
Berberidaceae	Barberry Family	
<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>	Barberry	CB PP
Betulaceae	Birch Family	
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver Birch	
Boraginaceae	Borage Family	
<i>Borago officinalis</i>	Borage	B
<i>Buglossoides purpureo-caerulea</i>	Purple Gromwell	Ar Bi L
<i>Cynoglossum creticum</i>		B L
<i>Echium plantagineum</i>	Purple Viper's-bugloss	R
<i>Lithodora fruticosum</i>	Shrubby Gromwell	CB
<i>Pulmonaria affinis</i>	Lungwort	H An
<i>Symphytum officinale</i>	Comfrey	B J
Brassicaceae	Cabbage Family	
<i>Aethionema saxatile</i>	Burnt Candytuft	L
<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>	Garlic Mustard	
<i>Alyssum alyssoides</i>	Small Alison	CB
<i>Arabis turrita</i>	Towercress	LG PP
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	Shepherd's-purse	
<i>Cardamine heptaphylla</i>	Seven-leaved Bittercress	An
<i>Cardaria draba</i>	Hoary Cress	
<i>Erophila verna</i>	Whitlow-Grass	
<i>Lepidium heterophyllum</i>	Smith's Pepperwort	B
<i>Lunaria rediviva</i>	Perennial Honesty	J
<i>Matthiola fruticulosa</i>	Sad Stock	CB
<i>Nasturtium officinale</i>	Watercress	B
Buxaceae	Box Family	
<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>	Box	CB PP
Caprifoliaceae	Honeysuckle Family	
<i>Lonicera etrusca</i>	Perfoliate Honeysuckle	LG
<i>L. xylosteum</i>	Fly Honeysuckle	B
<i>Sambucus ebulus</i>	Dwarf Elder	B
<i>S. nigra</i>	Elder	
<i>S. racemosum</i>	Red-berried Elder	H
<i>Viburnum lantana</i>	Wayfaring-tree	J
<i>V. opulus</i>	Guelder-rose	B J
Caryophyllaceae	Pink Family	
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	Common Mouse-ear	CB
<i>Paronychia argentea</i>		Bi
<i>Petrocoptis pyrenaica</i>	Rock Petrocoptis	Bi An
<i>Saponaria ocymoides</i>	Rock Soapwort	
<i>Silene alba</i>	White Campion	
<i>S. nutans</i>	Nottingham Catchfly	Bi
Celastraceae	Spindle Family	
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	Spindle	
Cistaceae	Rock-rose Family	
<i>Fumana ericoides</i>		CB LG
<i>Helianthemum apenninum</i>	White Rock-rose	CB PP
<i>H. canum</i>	Hoary Rock-rose	CB
<i>H. nummularium</i> ssp. <i>pyrenaicum</i>	Pyrenean Rock-rose	L
Convolvulaceae	Bindweed Family	
<i>Convolvulus cantabricus</i>	Cantabrian Bindweed	R
Cornaceae	Dogwood Family	
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	Dogwood	
Crassulaceae	Stonecrop Family	
<i>Sedum dasyphyllum</i>	Thick-leaved Stonecrop	R J
<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort	Bi

Cucurbitaceae*Bryonia dioica***Ericaceae***Arctostaphylos uva-ursi**Vaccinium myrtillus***Euphorbiaceae***Euphorbia amygdaloides**E. chamaebuxus**E. characias**E. flavicoma**E. helioscopia**E. lathyrus**E. serrata***Fabaceae***Anthyllis vulneraria* ssp. *pyrenaica**Argyrolobium zanonii**Astragalus monspessulanus**Cercis siliquastrum**Coronilla emerus**Dorycnium hirsutum**D. pentaphyllum**Echinopartium horridum**Genista hispanica**G. scorpius**Hippocrepis comosa**Lathyrus setifolius**Ononis fruticosa**Psoralea bituminosa**Robinia pseudoacacia**Tetragonolobus maritimus***Fagaceae***Fagus sylvatica**Quercus coccifera**Q. ilex**Q. petraea**Q. pyrenaica***Fumariaceae***Corydalis solida**Fumaria capreolata**F. officinalis***Gentianaceae***Gentiana acaulis**G. verna***Geraniaceae***Erodium cicutarium**E. moschatum**Geranium lucidum**G. molle**G. purpureum**G. robertianum**G. rotundifolium***Gesneriaceae***Ramonda myconi***Globulariaceae***Globularia cordifolia**G. punctata**G. repens***Lamiaceae***Ajuga chamaepitys**Lamium amplexicaule**L. purpureum**Melittis melissophyllum**Phlomis lychnitis**Rosmarinus officinalis**Salvia verbenaca***Cucumber Family**

White Bryony

Heather Family

Bearberry

Bilberry

Spurge Family

Wood Spurge

Pyrenean Spurge

Large Mediterranean Spurge

Sun Spurge

Caper Spurge

Serrated Spurge

Pea Family

Kidney Vetch

Montpelier Milk-vetch

Judas Tree

Scorpion Vetch

Spanish Gorse

Berdún Broom

Horseshoe Vetch

Shrubby Rest-harrow

Pitch Trefoil

False Acacia

Dragon's-teeth

Oak Family

Beech

Kermes Oak

Holm Oak

Sessile Oak

Pyrenean Oak

Fumitory Family

Ramping Fumitory

Fumitory

Gentian Family

Trumpet Gentian

Spring Gentian

Crane's-bill Family

Common Stork's-bill

Musk Stork's-bill

Shining Crane's-bill

Dove's-foot Crane's-bill

Little-Robin

Herb-Robert

Round-leaved Crane's-bill

African-violet Family**Globularia Family**

Creeping Globularia

Labiata Family

Ground-pine

Henbit Dead-nettle

Red-Dead-nettle

Bastard Balm

Rosemary

Wild Clary

B Bi L

J

J

CB PP HP**CB****PP Bi****HP**

B

CB**LG PP**

Ar

CB

B

CB LG

R

R

J

Ar

CB PP**CB**

B

CB**LG**

B R

CB**PP HP****CB PP****CB LG PP****PP****PP****HP**

L

B

HP**HP**

B

LG

L

LG

Bi R

PP**CB****HP**

Ar

Bi

CB

R

L

<i>Stachys recta</i>	Yellow Woundwort	R
<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	Shrubby Thyme	CB PP
Lentibulariaceae	Butterwort Family	
<i>Pinguicula grandiflora</i>	Large-flowered Butterwort	E
Linaceae	Flax Family	
<i>Linum bienne</i>	Pale Flax	R
<i>L. narbonense</i>	Beautiful Flax	CB PP
Loranthaceae	Mistletoe Family	
<i>Viscum album</i> ssp. <i>album</i>	Mistletoe	CB
<i>Viscum album</i> ssp. <i>austriacum</i>		PP HP
Malvaceae	Mallow Family	
<i>Malva sylvestris</i>	Common Mallow	
<i>M. neglecta</i>	Dwarf Mallow	
Moraceae	Fig Family	
<i>Ficus carica</i>	Wild Fig	LG
Oleaceae	Olive Family	
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	Bi
<i>Jasminum fruticans</i>	Wild Jasmine	B L
<i>Olea europaea</i>	Olive	R
Orobanchaceae	Broomrape Family	
<i>Lathraea clandestina</i>	Purple Toothwort	B Ar An
<i>Orobanche amethystea</i>		Bi
<i>O. caryophyllacea</i>	Bedstraw Broomrape	Bi
<i>O. gracilis</i>		Y
Oxalidaceae	Wood-sorrel Family	
<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>	Wood-sorrel	HP
Papaveraceae	Poppy Family	
<i>Chelidonium majus</i>	Greater Celandine	Bi
<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>	Common Poppy	
Plantaginaceae	Plantain Family	
<i>Plantago sempervirens</i>	Shrubby Plantain	R
Polygalaceae	Milkwort Family	
<i>Polygala comosa</i>	Tufted Milkwort	PP
<i>P. vulgaris</i>	Common Milkwort	CB
Polygonaceae	Dock Family	
<i>Oxyria digyna</i>	Mountain Sorrel	Bi
Primulaceae	Primrose Family	
<i>Anagallis arvensis</i>	Scarlet Pimpernel	
<i>Coris monspeliensis</i>		Ar
<i>Primula elatior</i>	Oxlip	HP
<i>P. hirsuta</i>		P
<i>P. veris</i>	Cowslip	J HP
Ranunculaceae	Buttercup Family	
<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>	Wood Anemone	H
<i>A. ranunculoides</i>	Yellow Anemone	H
<i>Aquilegia vulgaris</i>	Columbine	LG PP
<i>Caltha palustris</i>	Marsh-marigold	HP
<i>Clematis vitalba</i>	Traveller's-joy	
<i>Helleborus foetidus</i>	Stinking Hellebore	CB PP
<i>H. viridis</i>	Green Hellebore	HP
<i>Hepatica nobilis</i>	Hepatica	PP HP
<i>Ranunculus aquatilis</i>	Common Water-crowfoot	J
<i>R. arvensis</i>	Corn Buttercup	B
<i>R. ficaria</i>	Lesser Celandine	
<i>R. gouanii</i>	Gouan's Buttercup	HP
<i>R. gramineus</i>	Grass-leaved Buttercup	LG PP
<i>R. pyrenaicus</i>	Pyrenean Buttercup	HP
Resedaceae	Mignonette Family	
<i>Reseda phyteuma</i>	Corn Mignonette	Ar
Rhamnaceae	Buckthorn Family	
<i>Rhamnus alaternus</i>	Mediterranean Buckthorn	LG
<i>R. pumilus</i>	Dwarf Buckthorn	HP
Rosaceae	Rose Family	
<i>Amelanchier ovalis</i>	Snowy Mespilus	CB PP
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	

<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	Wild Strawberry	J
<i>Malus sylvestris</i>	Crab Apple	
<i>Potentilla tabernaemontani</i>	Spring Cinquefoil	CB PP
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Wild Cherry	
<i>P. mahaleb</i>	St Lucie's Cherry	Bi L
<i>P. spinosa</i>	Blackthorn	
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	Bramble	
<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>	Salad Burnet	CB
<i>Sorbus aria</i>	Whitebeam	PP
<i>S. torminalis</i>	Wild Service-tree	V
<i>Spiraea hypericifolia</i>	Bridal-wreath	L
Rubiaceae	Bedstraw Family	
<i>Cruciata laevipes</i>	Crosswort	J
<i>Rubia peregrina</i>	Wild Madder	
<i>Sherardia arvensis</i>	Field Madder	
Salicaceae	Willow Family	
<i>Populus nigra</i>	Black Poplar	Ar
<i>Salix alba</i>	White Willow	Bi
<i>S. purpurea</i>	Purple Willow	Ar
Santalaceae	Sandalwood Family	
<i>Osiris alba</i>		LG PP
Saxifragaceae	Saxifrage Family	
<i>Saxifraga corbariensis</i>		R
<i>S. longifolia</i>	Pyrenean Saxifrage	LG PP HP
<i>S. oppositifolia</i>	Purple Mountain Saxifrage	P
Scrophulariaceae	Figwort Family	
<i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	Snapdragon	LG
<i>Chaenorhinum organifolium</i>		LG PP
<i>Cymbalaria muralis</i>		B
<i>Linaria alpina</i>	Ivy-leaved Toadflax	HP
<i>Rhinanthus angustifolius</i>	Alpine Toadflax	
<i>Veronica austriaca</i>	Greater Yellow-rattle	R
<i>V. hederifolia</i>	Large Speedwell	Y
<i>V. persica</i>	Ivy-leaved Speedwell	
Solanaceae	Common Field Speedwell	
<i>Hyoscyamus niger</i>	Nightshade Family	
Thymelaeaceae	Henbane	B
<i>Daphne laureola</i>	Daphne Family	
Tiliaceae	Spurge-laurel	J H
<i>Tilia cordata</i>	Lime Family	
Violaceae	Small-leaved Lime	PP
<i>Viola odorata</i>	Violet Family	
<i>V. pyrenaica</i>	Sweet Violet	PP
<i>V. riviniana</i>	Pyrenean Violet	HP
	Common Dog-violet	J
MONOCOTYLEDONS		
Amaryllidaceae	Daffodil Family	
<i>Narcissus pseudonarcissus</i> ssp. <i>alpestris</i>	Alpine Daffodil	J
<i>N. pseudonarcissus</i> ssp. <i>pseudonarcissus</i>	Wild Daffodil	HP
<i>N. rupicola</i>	Rock Daffodil	PP
Dioscoreaceae	Yam Family	
<i>Tamus communis</i>	Black Bryony	Bi
Iridaceae	Iris Family	
<i>Iris germanica</i>	Purple Iris	
<i>I. graminea</i>	Grass-leaved Iris	Ar
Liliaceae	Lily Family	
<i>Allium moly</i>	Yellow Garlic	Bi
<i>A. roseum</i>	Rose Garlic	R
<i>Asparagus acutifolius</i>		CB
<i>Asphodelus albus</i>	White Asphodel	J LG
<i>Fritillaria lusitanica</i>	Lusitanian Fritillary	Ar
<i>Hyacinthus amethystinus</i>	Pyrenean Hyacinth	Bi L
<i>Muscari comosum</i>	Tassel Hyacinth	CB
<i>M. neglectum</i>	Grape-hyacinth	J
<i>Ornithogalum umbellatum</i>	Star-of-Bethlehem	CB

<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i>	Butcher's-broom	
<i>Scilla lilio-hyacinthus</i>	Pyrenean Squill	H An
<i>Tulipa sylvestris</i>	Wild Tulip	Ar
Orchidaceae	Orchid Family	
<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>	Sword-leaved Helleborine	Ar
<i>Ophrys fusca</i>	Sombre Bee-orchid	CB
<i>O. insectifera</i>	Fly Orchid	V
<i>O. lutea</i>	Yellow Bee Orchid	Y
<i>O. speculum</i>	Mirror Orchid	Y
<i>O. sphegodes</i>	Early Spider-orchid	CB
<i>Dactylorhiza sambucina</i>	Elder-flowered Orchid	PP HP
<i>Orchis champaneuxii</i>	Champagne Orchid	B LG
<i>O. mascula</i>	Early Purple-orchid	H
<i>O. purpurea</i>	Lady Orchid	CB LG
<i>O. militaris</i>	Military Orchid	Ar
<i>O. ustulata</i>	Burnt Orchid	V
Poaceae	Grass Family	
<i>Phragmites australis</i>	Common Reed	B
<i>Poa bulbosa</i>	Bulbous Meadow-grass	CB
Typhaceae	Reedmace Family	
<i>Typha latifolia</i>	Greater Reedmace	B
LICHENS		
<i>Cladonia foliacea</i>		
<i>Usnea</i> sp.	Beard Lichen	
<i>Xanthoria parietina</i>	Starburst Lichen	
FUNGI		
<i>Scutellinia scutellata</i>	Eyelash fungus	
<i>Phragmidium tuberculatum</i>	A rust on wild rose	
<i>Gymnosporangium clavariiforme</i>	A rust on hawthorn	
<i>Puccinia alnetorum</i>	A rust on wild clematis	
<i>Puccinia malvacearum</i>	A rust on common mallow	
<i>Uromyces graminis</i>	A rust on fennel	
<i>Melampsora epitea</i>	A rust on spindle	
<i>Colletotrichum trichellum</i>	A brown spot on ivy leaves	
<i>Phyllosticta cornicola</i>	A red leaf spot on dogwood	
<i>Taphrina deformans</i>	A red leaf gall on almond	
BACTERIA		
<i>Xanthomonas campestris</i> pv. <i>hederae</i>	A ring blotch on ivy leaves	
BLUE-GREEN ALGAE		
<i>Nostoc commune</i>		



Eyelash fungus.

BIRDS

Great Crested Grebe	Single birds on Yesa and Peña Reservoirs
Little Egret	Up to 4 on the Aragón, and some dawn movement; Yesa (1)
Grey Heron	Small numbers in the Aragón, with some early morning movement, maximum 10 birds
Cormorant	Early morning movement along the Aragón (14 birds) on one day; one in flight over the Búbal Reservoir
Gannet	Several birds offshore of Biarritz as the plane approached the runway
Mallard	Aragón; Yesa
Black Kite	Numerous, especially lower down
Red Kite	Less numerous than black kite, though widespread; the most frequent kite at montane levels
Lammergeier	Martés; upper Hecho valley
Egyptian Vulture	1-3 birds at Santa Cruz, Berdún, Arbayún
Griffon Vulture	Widespread, with notable concentrations at Santa Cilia feeding centre (160+), and over Berdún (up to 50)
Short-toed Eagle	Singles at Arbayún, Biniés and Peña Reservoir
Golden Eagle	Ansó (adult); Portalet (immature)
Common Buzzard	Widespread, especially on journeys, perched on telegraph poles; not common
Booted Eagle	Singles at Berdún, Arbayún and Riglos
Peregrine	La Virgen de la Peña, one noisy male
Kestrel	Berdún, Lumbier, Formigal
Hobby	Aragón (2, perhaps 3) and one migrating over Portalet in the snow
Red-legged Partridge	Pairs observed on several days in the lowlands
Little Ringed Plover	Aragón, at Martés Bridge (2)
Common Sandpiper	Aragón, at Martés (up to 3)
Black-headed Gull	Single adult on the Aragón
Yellow-legged Gull	Aragón, and Peña Reservoir
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Flock of 16 migrating north over Portalet
Feral Pigeon	Widespread around settlements; some reasonably convincing Rock Doves at Riglos
Woodpigeon	Frequent in pairs and small groups
Collared Dove	Abundant in built-up areas
Turtle Dove	Berdún
Little Owl	Berdún
Cuckoo	Berdún; La Virgen de la Peña
Kingfisher	Aragón at Martés
Common Swift	Migrants only, none yet settled; numerous toward the end of the week, though moving in pulses
Alpine Swift	Arbayún; Aragón Valley
Bee-eater	Berdún (8), Riglos (c10)
Hoopoe	Fago
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Berdún, St Juan de la Peña, Lumbier
Green Woodpecker	Berdún, Arbayún, Hecho, Fago
Black Woodpecker	La Virgen de la Peña
Wryneck	Martés Bridge (1-2), Berdún Marsh (one seen and heard well)
Crested Lark	Lowlands
Skylark	Portalet, in song, but less usually also at Berdún
Woodlark	Berdún; Santa Cilia
Crag Martin	Gorges and cliff habitats; nesting on Santa Cruz church
Swallow	Common; considerable migration still taking place
House Martin	Common; settled on territories
Water Pipit	Portalet; Upper Ansó valley
Yellow Wagtail	One yellow wagtail, not sub-specifically identified, flying over
Grey Wagtail	Upland and gorge rivers
White Wagtail	Common
Dipper	Upper Hecho valley
Wren	Mainly upland forest and gorges
Dunnock	Upper Hecho and Ansó Valleys
Robin	Very vocal especially at higher levels, although still some lower down where they are typically mainly winter visitors
Nightingale	Became abundant in the lowlands during the course of the week

Black Redstart	From lowland to mountain tops, a wide altitudinal range around cliffs, rocks and buildings
Redstart	Berdún
Stonechat	Thinly spread, from Badlands to high pastures
Northern Wheatear	Berdún; Portalet
Blue Rock Thrush	Biniés; surprisingly infrequent this year
Rock Thrush	Portalet
Blackbird	Common
Mistle Thrush	Ansó valley
Song Thrush	Berdún; Ansó and Hecho valleys
Savi's Warbler	Berdún Marsh
Grasshopper Warbler	Near Berdún Marsh
Cetti's Warbler	Common in the valleys; not always close to water
Sedge Warbler	Berdún Marsh
Melodious Warbler	Strong arrival at the end of the week
Western Oliveaceous Warbler	One near Berdún Marsh
Sardinian Warbler	Berdún; Riglos
Western Subalpine Warbler	Frequent, Berdún and elsewhere, more so than in previous years
Whitethroat	Berdún
Western Orphean Warbler	Santa Cruz; Hecho valley
Blackcap	extremely abundant at low and mid-altitudes
Garden Warbler	Berdún Marsh
Western Bonelli's Warbler	Very obvious in mid-level forests, as at Santa Cruz and Santa Cilia
Northern Chiffchaff	Frequent
Iberian Chiffchaff	Two in the Aragón valley (and a mixed singer on a second visit)
Willow Warbler	Aragón valley
Goldcrest	San Juan de la Peña; Ansó and Hecho valleys
Firecrest	Santa Cruz; San Juan de la Peña; Hecho valley
Spotted Flycatcher	Berdún Marsh
Pied Flycatcher	Aragón valley
Long-tailed Tit	Riverine woodland to montane forests
Crested Tit	San Juan de la Peña; Upper Ansó valley
Marsh Tit	La Virgen; Upper Ansó valley
Coal Tit	Conifer forest and plantations everywhere
Blue Tit	Common
Great Tit	Common
Nuthatch	San Juan de la Peña;
Short-toed Treecreeper	Aragón; Ansó Valley; Santa Cilia
Golden Oriole	Berdún Marsh
Jay	Frequent in forests
Magpie	Common in the lowlands
Alpine Chough	Large groups seen at very high levels
Red-billed Chough	Portalet; Lumbier and Arbayún; Ansó Valley; Fago
Carrion Crow	Common in lowlands
Raven	Seen regularly at all levels
Spotless Starling	Common in urban habitats
House Sparrow	Common around houses, bridges etc
Rock Sparrow	Numerous at Berdún and Martés Bridge
Chaffinch	Common, especially in mountain forests
Serin	Very common in the lowlands
Greenfinch	Common at lower levels
Goldfinch	Very common in the lowlands
Linnet	Small groups in the Badlands and the higher valleys
Crossbill	Forests between Ansó and Roncal
Yellowhammer	Higher mountain valleys
Cirl Bunting	Frequent in the lowlands
Corn Bunting	Abundant at low levels

Total – 110 species

and that was without seeing several expected species, including quail, scops owl, shrikes, black-eared or black wheatears, rock bunting, or Dartford warbler.

MAMMALS

Northern Mole	molehills only
Red Squirrel	H (seen); evidence in all conifer areas
Alpine Marmot	HP
Stone Marten	B (droppings)
Red Fox	B (droppings)
Brown Bear	H (droppings) (<i>right</i>)
Wild Boar	PP (rootings only)
Roe Deer	CB HP
Izard	HP

Sadly, though not surprisingly given the lack of warm, still evenings, no bats were seen this year.



AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Iberian Water Frog	Ar	Iberian Wall Lizard	CB PP	Green Lizard	Fa
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BUTTERFLIES

Red-underwing Skipper	R	Brimstone		Duke-of-Burgundy	V
Scarce Swallowtail		Cleopatra		Brown Argus	Y
Spanish Festoon	Y Bi	Peacock		Common Blue	
Large White		Comma		Chequered Blue	An
Small White		Red Admiral		Panoptes Blue	B
Green-veined White		Small Tortoiseshell	HP	Green-underside Blue	R
Orange-tip		Violet Fritillary	Y	Holly Blue	
Moroccan Orange-tip	V	Nettle-tree Butterfly	R	Small Blue	
Clouded Yellow		Southern Speckled Wood		Green Hairstreak	V
Wood White	LG	Wall Brown			

MOTHS

<i>Stigmella aurella</i>	Leaf mines on bramble	
<i>Adela australis</i>	A longhorn moth	B
<i>Adela croesella</i>	A longhorn moth	Bi
<i>Adela reaumurella</i>	A longhorn moth	B
<i>Psyche casta</i>	A bagworm	B
<i>Yponomeuta cagnagella</i>	A small ermine on spindle	L
<i>Yponomeuta mahalebella</i>	A small ermine on St Lucie's cherry	L
<i>Schiffermuelleria grandis</i>		B
<i>Orthopygia glaucinalis</i>		J
Oak Hook-tip		B
Giant Peacock		J
Small Eggar	Caterpillars in communal web	B
Fox Moth	Eggs on bramble	B
Common Heath		
Grey-bordered Bloom		B
Early Thorn		J
Brown-tail Moth	Larval webs around	B
Pine Processionary Moth	Larval webs everywhere where there were pine trees	
Hummingbird Hawk-moth		E
Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth		Y V
Hebrew Character		J
Bright-line Brown-eye		B
White-point		J
Delicate		J
Dagger sp.		J
Knot-grass		B
Four-spotted		Y
Burnet Companion		R
Silver Y		B

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

<i>Cepaea hortensis</i>	A banded snail	
<i>Rumina decollata</i>	A sawn-off snail	R
<i>Arion ater</i>	Large Black Slug	
<i>Aceria monspessulani</i>	A mite pouch-gall on Montpellier maple	Bi
<i>Dermacentor reticulatus</i>	Meadow Tick	L
<i>Heliophanus</i> sp.	A black and white jumping spider	
<i>Salticus scenicus</i>	Zebra Spider	
<i>Eris nidicolens</i>	A jumping spider	
<i>Micrommata virescens</i>	A large green spider	R
<i>Misumena vatia</i>	Ghost Crab-spider	B
<i>Synaema globosum</i>	A crab-spider	
<i>Xysticus erraticus</i>	A black-and-white crab-spider	
<i>Araniella cucurbitina</i>	Cucumber Spider	
<i>Mangora acalypha</i>	An orb-web spider	
<i>Nigma puella</i>	A mesh-web spider	
<i>Machilus</i> sp?	A large bristletail	Bi
<i>Oedipoda germanica</i>	Red-winged Grasshopper	CB PP
<i>Calliptamus italicus</i>	A red-thighed grasshopper	Y
<i>Anacridium aegyptiacum</i>	Egyptian Locust	R
<i>Pholidoptera griseoaptera</i>	Dark Bush-cricket	
<i>Gryllus campestris</i>	Field Cricket	
<i>Macrosiphonella absinthii</i>	Aphid on wormwood	
<i>Macrosiphon jasminii</i>	Aphid gall on wild jasmine	
<i>Aphis fabae</i>	Black Bean-aphid	
<i>Dysaphis crataegi</i>	Aphid gall on hawthorn	
<i>Spanioneura buxi</i>	A psyllid gall on box	L
<i>Cacopsylla</i> sp.	A large stripy psyllid	
<i>Pyrhocoris apterus</i>	Fire-bug	B
<i>Corizus hyoscyami</i>	A red-and-black bug	B
<i>Asiraca clavicornis</i>	A thick-horned bug	L
<i>Issus coleoptratus</i>	Toad Bug	B
<i>Coccus ilicis</i>	Berry gall on kermes oak	LG
<i>Graphosoma italicum</i>	A red-and-black shield-bug	B
<i>Palomena prasina</i>	Green Shield-bug	Bi
<i>Rhapigaster nebulosa</i>	A brown shield-bug	B
<i>Dolycoris baccarum</i>	Hairy Shield-bug	B
<i>Piezodorus lituratus</i>	Gorse Shield-bug	B
<i>Eurydema oleracea</i>	Brassica Shield-bug	Bi
<i>Eurydema ornata</i>	A red-and-black shield bug	B
<i>Eurydema ventralis</i>	Another red-and-black shield bug	B
<i>Coreus marginatus</i>	A squash-bug	B
<i>Capsodes</i> sp. (nymph)	A plant-bug	B
<i>Closterotomus fulvomaculatus</i>	A plant-bug	B
<i>Dicranocephalus agilis</i>	A spurge-bug	B
<i>Melanocoryphus albomaculatus</i>	A red-and-black seed-bug	B
<i>Cicindela campestris</i>	Green Tiger-beetle	Ar
<i>Gerris lacustris</i>	Common Pond-skater	
<i>Aquarius najas</i>	Large Pond-skater	
<i>Timarcha tenebricosa</i>	Bloody-nosed Beetle	L
<i>Coccinella septempunctata</i>	Seven-spot Ladybird	
<i>Henosepilachna argus</i>	Bryony Ladybird	Bi L
<i>Geotrupes pyrenaeus</i>	Pyrenean Dor-beetle	H
<i>Oxythyrea funesta</i>	Spotted Flower-chafer	L
<i>Phyllobius pyri</i>	A green weevil	
<i>Rhynchites auratus</i>	A purplish weevil	B
<i>Malachius bipustulatus</i>	A malachite beetle	Ar
<i>Nephrotoma submaculosa</i>	A golden-spotted crane-fly	
<i>Episyrphus balteatus</i>	Marmalade Hoverfly	
<i>Helophilus pendulus</i>	A hoverfly	
<i>Eristalis tenax</i>	Drone-fly	
<i>Gymnosoma</i> sp.	A tachinid fly	
<i>Anthomyia pluvialis</i>	Root-maggot Fly	
<i>Phytomyza vitalbae</i>	A leaf-mining fly on wild clematis	
<i>Contarinia acerpicans</i>	A leaf-edge-roll gall on Montpellier maple	

Arge pagana
Apis mellifera
Formica rufa
Messor barbara
Camponotus vagus
Bombus pascuorum
Xylocopa violacea
Polistes gallicus
Ancistrocerus sp.
Diplolepis rosae
Blennocampa phyllocolpa

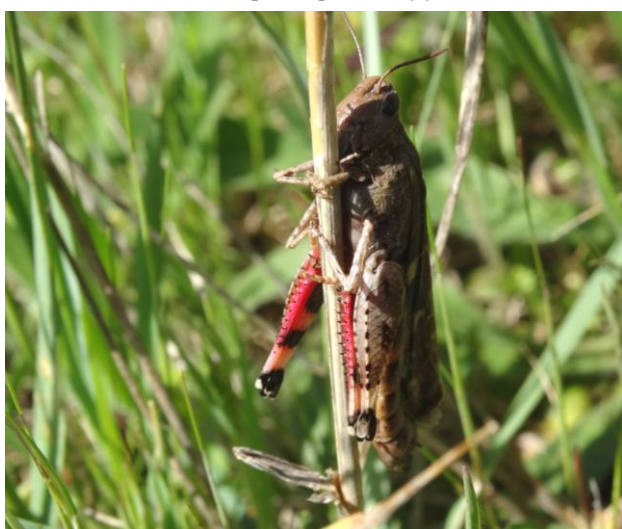
Rose Sawfly
 Honeybee
 Wood Ant
 A large black ant
 A large ant
 Common Carder-bee
 Violet Carpenter-bee
 A paper wasp
 A solitary wasp
 Robin's Pincushion gall
 A leaf-roll sawfly gall on wild rose



Micrommata virescens.



Meadow tick.



Red-thighed grasshopper.



Bloody-nosed beetle.