

## SOUTH OF SALAMANCA HONEYGUIDE HOLIDAY REPORT MAY 2025

### Day 1 Tuesday May 6<sup>th</sup> Arrival at Salvatierra

We met up at the airport, arriving just after 1pm in time for lunch. Later we had a walk around the village. There was a White stork nest on the ruins of the church/ synagogue surprisingly close to the ground.



White stork on nest



Spotless starlings bathing

A Black kite swooped down into the village, Barn swallows collected mud, Spotless starlings bathed in a puddle and Black redstart flitted across between roofs and walls. Peter spotted a Black vulture close enough to be able to make out its lighter coloured feet against the darker tail. A Hoopoe floated past with something dangling from its beak and Jackie found a male Cirl bunting perched on a fence by a field. We spotted a Northern wheatear on a wall which flew into a wall opposite before dropping down to the road. As we stopped to watch a Buzzard in the distance we were aware of a Nightingale singing softly nearby. On close inspection it was found on a branch by some brambles. It continued to sing softly as we watched it, whilst a ginger cat padded across the wall behind it oblivious to its presence.



Nightingale



Black kite

The Black kite reappeared and a Kestrel seemed to be mobbing it. The kite then proceeded to circle around close by, above a field with Iberian pigs. There was a crested lark drinking in a puddle. We first heard, then saw, bee-eaters, and one being chased off a cable by a House sparrow. Vega heard some loud chirping from the wall of a large recently restored house, and found a Spanish sparrow sitting tight in a hole, probably keeping guard over its nest. (They build spherical nests in trees or holes).



Watching the kite



Spanish sparrow



Day 2 Wednesday May 7<sup>th</sup> – Reservoir and mosaic area, and Tormes riverside area



By the reservoir

We drove uphill to an area of meadow and Mediterranean maquis just north of Salvatierra with Holm and Portuguese oaks next to the reservoir. We looked at a Violet carpenter bee *Xylocopa violacea* on Spanish lavender *Lavandula pedunculata*, and there were stands of Champagne orchid *Orchis champagneuxii* with bright yellow composites, probably *Crepis*, everywhere as well as small White rockrose *Helianthemum violaceum*, recognizable from its drop-down buds, and Egyptian sunrose *Helianthemum aegyptiacum*.



*Xylocopa violacea*



*Orchis champagneuxii*

Low on the ground was the lovely yellow Kidney vetch *Anthyllis lotoides* and the strange star-shaped Carpet cudweed *Filago carpetana*. There was also Annual valerian *Centranthus calcitrapae*.



*Anthyllis lotoides*



*Filago carpetana*

A variety of birds appeared including Bee-eaters, Turtle dove, Black kite, Black vulture, a pair of white Booted eagles, Hoopoe, Woodchat shrike, Wood and Crested lark, Serin, Corn bunting and Rock sparrow.



There were rabbits amongst the holm oaks, making a comeback after various epidemics. Nightingales were singing in the background along with the Woodlarks. The predominant butterfly was Small heath.



Booted eagle



Hoopoe

Coffee back at hotel, then on the way to the village of Vega and Alfonso we saw a large group of Griffon vulture near a pig farm, all probably digesting their recent meal.



Our next stop was the village to see the Spanish sparrows building their nests below and in the gutter of Vega's house, Iberian frogs in the water trough and some Melodious warblers amongst the brambles and field roses. We then continued along the path for a walk between pasture and holm oaks.



Spanish sparrows at work



Here fields were covered in Tassel hyacinth *Muscari comosum* and Bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus subsp. aleae*. To the side of the track was a Fumitory *Fumaria*, and the endemics Thrift *Armeria transmontana* and the borage Undulate Alkanet *Anchusia undulata*, as well as more *Helianthemum violaceum* and Wild clary *Salvia verbenaca*.





Field with tassel hyacinth and Bulbous buttercup



*Armeria transmontana*

Ruth found a red-striped oil beetle *Berberomeloe majalis*, which was burrowing underground, and on the path was a sadly defunct three-toed skink.



*Helianthemum violaceum*



*Berberomeloe majalis*

There were Bee-eaters nesting close to the stream and we caught a glimpse of a Turtle dove as it flew past. Ray pointed out a Golden oriole which briefly showed itself before disappearing into a holm oak. A cuckoo was calling and the Nightingale continued to sing. Butterflies included Clouded yellow, Sooty copper, Small heath and Queen of Spain fritillary, and a possible Western dappled white.



Mating Small heath



Iberian sooty copper

We had a 'light' lunch with salad, tortilla, cheese and cold meats at **Restaurante La Pedriza** in La Tala.

Due to the high rains and subsequent high river level we reprogrammed the afternoon, and instead of going to the shores of the Tormes we visited the slate landscape of Berrocal de Salvatierra, in search of



Black-eared wheatear. First we saw a pair of Northern wheatear, then we spotted a fine male Black-eared wheatear. We also saw Iberian magpie, Hoopoe and more Bee-eaters.



Black-eared wheatear



Bee-eaters and Hoopoe

We explored a meadow between the track and the river where there were mauve toadflax *Linaria incarnata*, Champagne orchid and the attractive stripy Sainfon *Onobrychys humilis*. The track was covered with Red sand spurry *Spergularia rubra*. There was a Yellow belle moth *Aspitates ochrearia*.



Landscape with slate



*Linaria incarnata*



*Aspitates ochrearia*



*Narcissus bulbocodium*



Woodlark

We walked beside a stream serenaded by Nightingales with a few late Hoop petticoat daffodil *Narcissus bulbocodium*, and spotted Iberian magpie and Woodlark and a Spanish pond turtle in a pond. On the way back to the hotel we saw a Hobby on a post.



**Day 3 Thursday May 8<sup>th</sup> – Wine press, Miranda del Castañar, Sierra de Francia Natural Park.**

We visited a traditional open-air granite wine-press on the eastern edge of the Sierra de Francia.



The press is surrounded by wild flowers, including Ballest toadflax *Linaria spartea*, Vipers bugloss, White campion *Silene latifolia*, Thrift *Armeria transmontana*, endemic Gredos lupin *Lupinus gredensis*, stands of White broom *Retama*, Pinnate-leaved poppy *Papaver pinnatifidum*, the endemic Brotero's peony *Peonia broteri* and all around Golden oats or feather grass *Stipa gigantea*.



*Lupinus gredensis*



*Papaver pinnatifidum*



*Peonia broteri*



*Stipa gigantea*



A Forester moth *Adscita statices* was found and a Purple barred yellow moth *Lythria sanguinaria*. Amongst the Pyrenean oak trees were stands of Asphodel intermixed with Peony and the endemic Sharp-leaved spurge *Euphorbia oxyphylla*.



We could hear Golden oriole but the overcast sky and humidity kept the birds mainly out of sight.



Asphodel



*Euphorbia oxyphylla*



Forester moth



*Lythria sanguinaria*

We went on to the medieval village of **Miranda del Castañar** for coffee and a brief visit to the old centre.



Miranda del Castañar



Kerry lily

After looking from a mirador and watching Swallows and Red-rumped swallows we drove along a track between vineyards to a spot where there was a very interesting flower: Kerry lily *Simethis mattiazzii*. Unfortunately, in the past days there had been a very insensitive mechanical plant clearance and the patch had been eliminated. However, Vega knew of an isolated plant just off the track and Alfonso also discovered some more close to where we had parked, so we were all able to see it.





*Simethis mattiazii* details

There was also Three-toothed broom *Genista tridentata*, with its flattened leaves and trident, Pale flax *Linum bienne* and Jackie found a Narrow leaved helleborine orchid *Cephalanthera longifolia*. The only active butterfly was Speckled wood butterfly *Pararge aegeria*.



*Genista tridentata*



*Cephalanthera longifolia*



*Pararge aegeria*

A very varied and generous lunch was served at **El Pipero** and a brief walk behind the restaurant had to be abandoned as suddenly the heavens opened, but not before we'd spotted some Blue pimpernel *Anagallis monelli*, Annual Valerian *Centranthus calcitrapae*, and some Gentian gromwell *Glandora diffusa*.



Blue pimpernel



*Glandora diffusa*



We decided that the best plan would be to head back to the hotel, but on the way back as we saw it hadn't rained further west, we stopped at a granite meadow where there were abundant swaths of Tongue orchid *Serapia lingua*, and Deadly villous carrot *Thapsia villosa* in various stages of development. On the way back we saw Iberian magpie and Red and Black kites.



*Serapias lingua* and *Ranunculus bulbosus*



*Thapsia villosa*



#### **Day 4 Friday May 9<sup>th</sup> - Salamanca, River Tormes Alba Campo de Alba SPA**

The weather forecast was rain for the morning, so we decided to go to Salamanca for a visit and some birding from the Roman bridge. The river was very high and fast flowing so the birding wasn't great, but we saw Blackcaps and Tree sparrows and many White storks, with a Griffon vulture above the city.





In Salamanca town we heard and later saw a Kestrel but no sign of Lesser or the Peregrine which nests on the Cathedral tower. We had a coffee at the Alcaravan bar, and headed back to the river where Alfonso picked us up.

At Alba we had our picnic by the river with great views of a Short-toed treecreeper which was checking out all the nearby trees and disappearing under a straw parasol, possibly where it was nesting. Then a stroll along a tree-lined wide path between a mill pond and the river. There were Nightingales and Blackbirds competing, Cetti's warbler, Long-tailed tit and Blackcaps and we could hear but not see Reed warbler and Penduline tit. Another speckled wood and Peter spotted a Brown argus *Aricia cramera*. Jackie explained the differences between Erodium and Geranium: there are many different species here, this area was mostly covered with Musk stork's-bill *Erodium moschatum*.



*Erodium moschatum*



Speckled wood

Next we drove south of Alba to the cereal area. We stopped to watch a Yellow wagtail *Iberiae* floating up and down over a wheat field, then we saw a strange looking harrier, at first we thought it was a Marsh but then on further inspection Vega realized it was a melanistic female Montagu's.



Female Montagu's harrier hunting



Just as we came out onto a new track we saw a Great bustard flying across which landed on the edge of a ploughed field and stayed there whilst we looked through the telescope. A little further There were a couple of short-toed larks on the track, Corn buntings and many Calandra larks flying around, as well as very pretty male linnet and Northern wheatear in the fields. On our way back along the track a male Montague's came into view, possibly the partner of the female.





Great bustard



Northern wheatear



Male Montagu's harrier



Male Montagu's harrier



Driving back to the hotel another Montagu's harrier in the road, lifting something. It flew off and landed on a post nearby where it engulfed the object: probably a snake, but looks like a cigar!





### Day 5 Saturday May 10<sup>th</sup> - Sangusin & Alagon.

The forecast was complicated but we decided to stick to the programme. We headed south west towards the Sierras de Bejar, making a detour on the way to look at a Griffon vulture colony and some local plants. The detour turned out to be a good idea. A Golden oriole was spotted on top of a tree. There was a park warden checking on the vulture colony so we parked further down and surveyed the skies from there. Suddenly Griffon and Black vulture appeared, followed by Golden eagle, a pair of Peregrine falcon and a Short-toed eagle hanging in the sky. Crag martin and Red -rumped swallow started swooping low.



Golden oriole



Short-toed snake eagle



Short-toed snake eagle



Three lupin species

Here were three species of lupin: Narrow-leaved, (blue) Spanish (dark pink) and Gredos (pink and yellow).





We went on to Horcajo de Montemayor in the Sangusin valley, looking over the bridge at Spanish pond turtles *Mauremys leprosa* who were out on top of the rocks at the waters' edge and frogs singing loudly. We carried on along the track to the Bee-eaters' colony, which is now spread out along the whole of the track. There was little activity at the first stop but later as we continued through the Narrow-leaved Ash dehesa we could hear and see them flying high and around their burrows.



Spanish pond turtle



Bee-eater

We found a tiny Hairy pink *Petrorhagia dubia*, Asphodel, *Aristolochia paucinervis*, Lesser celandine, Mountain cornflower *Centaurea montana*, Brotero's peony *Paeonia broteri*, as well as an Arum which had not yet flowered and the endemic Dwarf foxglove *Digitalis thapsi*. Jackie found a small purple Orobanché under an oak tree, and there was *Tuberaria guttata* and more Sharp-leaved spurge *Euphorbia oxyphylla*.



*Petrorhagia dubia*



*Aristolochia paucinervis*



Orobanché



*Centaurea montana*



*Digitalis thapsi*



There were also Iberian magpie and Nuthatch, and a Scops owl calling, and we got great views of a Rock sparrow with the yellow rectangle under its chin.



As the sky threatened a storm we drove on to the village of Pinedas, and asked at the bar if they would let us have our picnic under the shelter of their porch. They obliged and we ate lunch without fear of being soaked or struck by lightning, as the storm finally broke and it poured. We had teas and coffees inside by the welcome heat of a wood-burning stove. The rain subsided long enough for us to have a brief stroll on a track lined with Yellow broom, Gum cistus *Cistus ladanifer*, Tree heather *Erica arborea*, *Pistacia terebinthus* and *Arbutus unedo*, overlooking the river Alagon valley. A Long-tailed tit and Blackcap were seen but little else, as although it was sunny the clouds still lingered dark.



Long-tailed tit

We looked in vain for the Nettle-tree butterfly but did see Small heath and Queen of Spain fritillary, some Iberian green frogs *Rana perezi* and a lovely Iberian wall lizard *Podarcis hispanicus*. As we were leaving we stopped to watch a Short-toed eagle suspended in the sky.



*Rana perezi*



*Podarcis hispanicus*



## Day 6 Sunday May 11<sup>th</sup> - Monleón and Quilamas mountains

Our first stop was at the medieval walled village of Monleón, overlooking the River Alagon. Competing for attention were Golden oriole and Blackcap, somewhere in the valley below. The walls and medieval castle housed Black redstart, House sparrow, Crag martin, Spotless starling and probably Kestrel, as we observed one repeatedly mobbing a Red kite. Purring in the background and finally seen on a bare branch was the lovely Turtle dove. Jays were making angry sounds in the valley.



Monleon



Turtle dove



*Linaria amethysteae*

Behind the castle facing south were *Salvia verbenaca*, Amethyst toadflax *Linaria amethysteae*, Ballast toadflax *Linaria sparteae*, and a pretty Crested wartycabbage *Bunias erucago*. We saw a Painted lady.



*Bunias erucago*



Painted lady



After coffee in Linares we drove through the forest towards the Pico Cervero, stopping at a flowery glade. Here were orchids *Orchis mascula* and *Cephalanthera longifolia* as well as the small yellow *Allium scorzonerifolium*. Also endemics *Aquilegia dichroa* and *Omphalodes nitida*, and *Pentaglottis sempervirens*.



*Orchis mascula*



*Allium scorzonerifolium*



*Aquilegia dichroa*





*Omphalodes nitida*



*Pentaglottis sempervirens*

By the roadside grew Primrose, more Peony and Leopardsbane *Doronicum plantagineum*.

We continued up to a mountain meadow at 1280m where there was Wood avens *Geum sylvaticum*, Annual valerian *Centranthus calcitrapae*, Garden star of Bethlehem *Ornithogalum umbellatum* and the tiny endemic Viscous umbelled rockrose *Cistus umbellatus* subsp. *viscosum*.



*Geum sylvaticum*



*Cistus umbellatus* subsp. *viscosum*



There was also some tiny *Saxifraga carpetana* and daisies with very large leaves: *Bellis sylvestris*. Birds foot trefoil grew close to the ground and a very dark and wrinkled fungus, possibly a *Helvella*. Further up the mountain were *Orchis mascula* and some Champagne orchids, and Mountain cornflower.



*Saxifraga carpetana*



*Helvella* fungus



*Bellis sylvestris*

Not much activity re birds: Woodlark singing and a Griffon vulture, but it was rather cold and windy. There was a Burnet companion moth, and some attractive caterpillars on bronze-coloured funghi. On the way down we saw Solomon's seal *Polygonatum odoratum*. We picniced in a hollow sheltered from the wind.



Unidentified funghi



Solomon's seal

After lunch we drove to a nearby granite meadow, with *Scilla ramburii*, *Fumaria officinalis* and *Saxifraga granulata*, as well as more *Aristolochia paucinervis*. We hoped to see more butterflies but it was too cold.



*Scilla ramburii*



*Fumaria officinalis*



At the granite meadow



## Day 7 Monday May 12<sup>th</sup> - River Tormes & Neila de San Miguel

On our way to Puente del Congosto we saw a Cuckoo on a wire. By the medieval bridge there were Melodious and Cetti's warbler, Serin, Nightingale and Cirl bunting, with Short-toed tree creeper and a female Sparrowhawk which flew into the trees and perched briefly. We could see the Stork and chicks on the church tower. Around the bridge were Swift, Black redstart, Rock sparrow, Black kite, Crag martin.



Melodious warbler



Cirl bunting photo Jackie Guthrie



Rock sparrow



Stork and chick



Puente del Congosto photo Peter Seal

A Griffon vulture flew over our heads, and we saw a Short-toed eagle far off, and we saw Hoopoe, White and Grey wagtail down by the river, and a Golden oriole was heard.



Castle and swifts



After coffee at **El Nido**, we walked parallel to the river amidst Holm oak and Mediterranean maquis: here were regional endemics Iberian Star of Bethlehem *Ornithogalum concinnum*; Thrift *Armeria transmontana* and the silvery-leaved astragalus *Astragalus incanus*; Sad stock *Matthiola fruticulosa*; endemic Pink campion *Silene scabriflora*; three cisti: *Tuberaria guttata*, *Cistus umbellatus* sbsp. *viscosum*, and *Helianthemum violaceum*; *Euphorbia oxyphylla* and more *Saxifraga carpetana*.





*Ornithogallum concinnum*



*Astragalus incannus*



*Matthiola fruticulosa*



*Silene scabriflora*



*Cistus umbellatus sbsp. viscosus*





*Euphorbia oxyphylla*

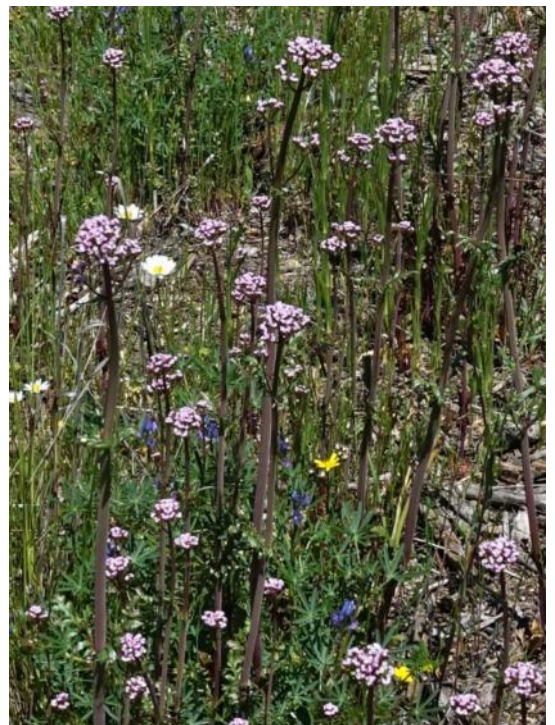


*Saxifraga carpetana*

Closer to the river we found French groundsel *Senecio gallicus*, a stand of Annual valerian *Centranthus calcitrapae* and some lovely Bulbous buttercups.



*Senecio gallicus*



*Centranthus calcitrapae*



*Ranunculus bulbosus* subsp. *aleae*



Woodchat shrike

Birds seen were Woodchat shrike, Iberian magpie, Golden Oriole and Woodlark.



As the weather had warmed up we were treated to many butterflies: Queen of Spain and Glanville fritillaries, Small copper, Bath white, Western dappled white, Small heath, Panoptes blue *Pseudophilotes panoptes*, Green underside blue, Brown argus, Orange tip, Speckled wood and Provence orange tip *Anthocaris euphenoides*. Down by the river we saw a strange pale yellow butterfly which we thought might be the African migrant, but turns out to be a weird-shaped Brimstone.



Glanville



Panoptes blue



Green-underside blue Photo Jackie Guthrie



Brown argus



Brimstone Photo Jackie Guthrie



After a bacalao and calamar **lunch** in the gardens of **El Nido**, we drove across the Avila border to the village of Neila de San Miguel, stopping on the way to watch another odd shaped Brimstone butterfly.



Belltower Neila



Lavadero wash stands

First we had a look at the bell tower and then we visited the stone lavadero and ancient chestnut grove. There were Broad-bodied chaser *Libelula depressa*, red trithemis and an unidentified black dragonfly. Butterflies included Orange tip, Moroccan orange tip, Queen of Spain fritillary, Small heath, Sooty copper, and a very worn Peacock. The Thrift here was pink. Birds included Booted eagle, W. Bonelli's warbler, Golden Oriole and Bee-eaters as well as many Swifts, Red rumped and Barn swallows.



Broad-bodied chaser



Queen of Spain fritillary



Peacock



*Armeria transmontana*



**Day 8 Tuesday May 13<sup>th</sup> - Sierra de Bejar, Biosphere Reserve & Candelario**

We drove up the mountain and stopped on the way up to look at *Narcissus rupicola*.



*Narcissus rupicola*



Narcissus with Armeria



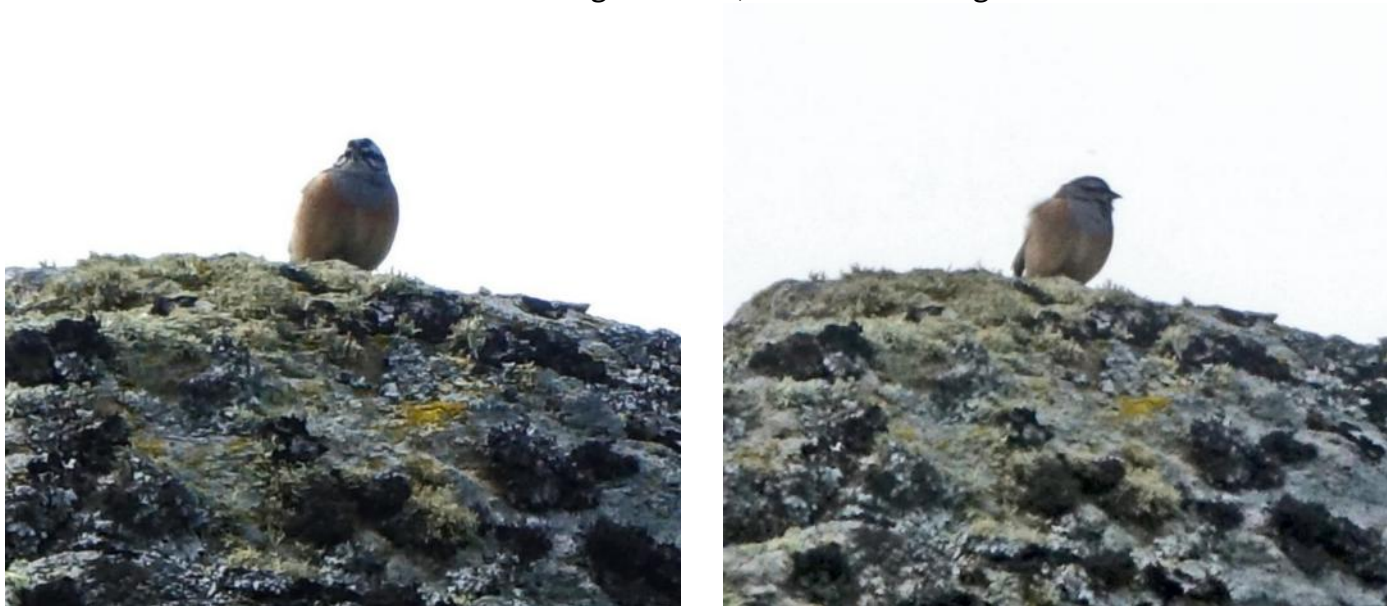


It was chilly, and there were Dunnock, Northern wheatear as well as Crag martin. Skylarks called from above. Vega briefly saw a Bluethroat which unfortunately dived into the vegetation and wasn't seen again. A Tawny pipit obligingly perched on a rock and later fed on the grass by the carpark.



Tawny pipit

We decided that a coffee was called for so we went to the village of Candelario, stopping off on the way down the mountain to watch a Rock bunting on a rock, and a Booted eagle above.



Rock bunting





We drove part way up the mountain and walked above a Pine forest looking at the flowers on the banks, mainly *Silene latifolia*, and *Saxifraga* with some *Leucanthemopsis pulvurulenta*, but the flowering was generally late because of the cold and wet spring. There were Western Bonelli's warblers singing as well as Firecrest, Nightingale and Serin. We went into the pine forest where we had some empanada at a picnic site overlooking the valley below, and after lunch Jackie discovered some *Linaria elegans*, and there was also a lovely pale yellow *Leucanthemopsis flaveola* or *pallida*. There was *Adenocarpus hispanicus* in flower which smells of incense, a Scarce swallowtail flew by and we spotted a Large psammodromus.



Large psammodromus



*Silene latifolia*



*Leucanthemopsis*



*Linaria elegans*



*Adenocarpus hispanicus*





We headed to Bejar to see a colony of nesting Lesser Kestrel in the middle of town, seeing a few on the wing or perched, and watched a Black kite chasing one above the roofs. From here we went to the nearby village of Valdesangil and walked in a flowery meadow with Spanish lavender, *Helianthemum violaceum*, Thrift, Spanish lupin, Hairy pinks, and lots of different vetch.



Golden oriole sang and briefly appeared, and there were many butterflies here, amongst which we identified Spanish festoon, Sooty copper, Brimstone, Spanish Marsh fritillary *Aurinia beckeri* and Queen of Spain. There was also the jewel like blue - green forester moths *Adscita statices*.



Sooty copper





Marsh fritillary *Aurinia beckeri*



*Aurinia beckeri*



Forester moth



Spanish festoon



We headed back to Salvatierra for our last supper together before departure to Madrid the following day.

Vega Bermejo Castelnau Birding in Spain's Wild West 27<sup>th</sup> May 2025