

Extremadura in Spring

Saturday 1 – Saturday 8 April 2006

Trip Report

Leaders:

Tim Earl

John Muddeman

Highlights

- Our first evening at the Finca Santa Marta, the reception given by Henri Elink-Schurman and the fun of dinner together.
- Great bustards displaying on the plains of Spain.
- A Spanish Imperial Eagle being mobbed (and mobbing in return) by a Griffon and several Ravens. It was still majestic and a great contender for bird of the trip.
- Wonderful views of a pair of Stone Curlews on the Magasca plains with Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and Montagu's Harriers overhead. (And the delicious tortilla we ate at a café in St Maria de Magasca.)
- The 'Heathrow-like' approach and landing of Griffons and Black Vultures coming in to feed on a dead sheep and in Monfragüe Natural Park.
- Masses of orchids at the finca and elsewhere on the tour.
- The raptor feeding station when 250 Griffons launched themselves from a cliff.
- Rollers on wires for ages as we scoped them.
- Flypast Gull-billed Tern and the Spoonbill close by.
- The display of a Little Bustard as it made jumps into the air – the first time John had seen this activity in nine years observation.

Daily diary

Saturday 1st April

Arrival, Café David, Embalse Arrocampo and the Finca Santa Marta

We were greeted by pandemonium at Heathrow terminal 1 with most of the UK's school-aged population helping their teachers or parents to check in. Happily, the discovery of a helpful BA staff member saw the Travelling Naturalists through this tense procedure fairly quickly and we were then pleased to relax 'air-side'. Our flight was delayed by the late arrival of the incoming

aircraft but we were away by 10.20 and soon flying over the Channel Islands which three of us had left the previous afternoon.

Derek spotted a flock of geese below us soon after, heading north-west as we passed over the south coast of Brittany in excess of 30,000ft (the pilot kindly supplied this information later). This was an extraordinary sighting and represented a valiant and successful attempt to see the first bird of the trip.

We found Madrid airport's new terminal vast; the train shuttle trip seemed so long that we ought to have been dropped in Extremadura, luggage came up in dribs and drabs and it was more than an hour after landing that we hiked out to meet John who was waiting for us. Not that time mattered. Our vehicles were not ready and it was 3.45pm before we finally left, happily in comfortable transport.

A stop at the Café David gave a taste of Spain with delicious tapas, a White Stork's nest, and a few distant raptors.

John had found a new pond which produced exciting birds such as two beautiful Garganey drakes, a Spotted Redshank in full breeding garb, five Teal, 18 Shovelers and other water birds.

We were sorting out Black Kites from brown Buzzards when a Black-shouldered Kite was spotted by Tim. It flew from its perch on a cable and gave us super views, finally ending in a classic hover. Distant views were had of a pale-morph Booted Eagle and a Short-toed Snake-eagle. A posing Crested Lark also delighted us.

The next stop at the Embalse Arrocampo was short but everyone had excellent views of Purple Swamphen (a horrible name for this super gallinule), Purple Heron and Marsh Harriers. A singing Savi's Warbler was distant, Cetti's Warblers were skulking and a Sardinian Warbler was characteristic in providing fleeting views. We resolved to return during the holiday and set off for the Finca Santa Marta.

Our welcome was warm and friendly with a reception by Henry Elink-Schurman to greet us at which he gave a history of the finca. He was thanked and we retired for a super meal at which the local wine flowed freely. This made our raucous attempts to locate singing Scops Owls rather futile so we parted in good spirits, looking forward to meeting before breakfast the following morning. It had been an excellent start.

Sunday 2 April

Finca first then south to the Zorita steppes, Rio Gargaligas, Vegas Altas and Embalse de Sierra Brava

Our first morning was delightful. After a cool night the sun started to rise and a dawn chorus woke many of us. A few set off at 8am to wander up through the finca's vineyards, almond and cherry orchards, the latter in spectacular bloom, to see the singers. Wood Larks fluted, Hoopoes hooted while flocks of Serins and Siskins sang sibilantly. The occasional 'tzit-tzit' revealed passing Hawfinches and a strange chuckling call was attributed to Booted Eagles nesting in the woods close by.

Short-toed Treecreepers, Blue and Great tits flitted around the old olive trees watched by a few Azure-winged Magpies and in the distance our first calling Cuckoo of the season sounded forth. It was all pure heaven.

Coffee and a great breakfast got under way at 9am (the staff start work an hour later on Sundays) and by 9.45 we had made our individual picnic lunches from the vast array of different bread, fillings, fruit and yoghurt.

We drove out to the Zorita steppes where a displaying Great Bustard was soon scoped. John found a flock of feeding Black-bellied Sandgrouse but they were against the light and it was not until three more flew in that we could see their characteristic 'dirty tummies'. A pair of Black-eared Wheatears looked stunning but views of a male Little Bustard were distant. Telescopes swung back onto the Great Bustard which had begun to display, turning itself inside out and strutting around like a cheerleader's white pompom.

A singing Short-toed Lark was a good find by John but Calandra Larks could not be pinned down, despite strong song.

Moving on to a little valley, Calandra Larks were finally seen well, their long wings black underneath with a white trailing edge. A male Montagu's Harrier quartered a grain field behind us prompting several gasps as this ghost of the plains plunged onto some unfortunate creature. Zitting Cisticolas and passing Ravens played a little and large show well while a few brilliantly coloured Bee-eaters danced the chorus-line.

The Rio Gargáligas had been dredged and the leaders were worried that there would be little to see. They need not have. A Nightingale was found and scoped, flocks of Red Avadavats flitted around, a Willow Warbler fed hungrily in a willow [where else *would* it feed – Ed?] and a Common Sandpiper was seen by some.

Lunch was eaten next to a river with singing Nightingales, Cetti's, Great Reed and Reed warblers, lots of butterflies and yet more Collared pratincoles. A few Griffons slipped past and a small number of Tree Sparrows were seen.

We stopped at the Embalse Sierra Brave on the way back where eight Black Vultures came into feed off a dead creature while more than 80 Griffons formed a huge kettle.

It was as super end to the birding but the holiday continued with afternoon tea and a few more birds at the finca.

Another great meal [with more White Stork wine, I expect – Ed?] was followed by a Scops Owl listening session.

Monday 3 April

Monfragüe Natural Park

An Imperial Eagle ought to be given due respect – especially a Spanish one – but not so. One of the great highlights of the trip was watching a male Spanish Imperial Eagle interacting with Ravens and Griffon Vultures over its nest (on which its mate was incubating the next generation of these highly endangered birds).

The upstarts mobbed the eagle but if they got too close a foot would shoot out, or the bird rolled on its back to attack the tormentors. It soared around the peak at Portilla del Tiétar in Monfragüe Natural Park.

The bird was joined by other eagles – we saw Booted and Short-toed as well – Griffons and the occasional Black Stork. One of the Short-toed (European Snake Eagle to us) was carrying a snake which it began to eat in the air head first. And as if that were not excitement enough for this 'Attenborough moment' a nesting Eagle Owl raised its head occasionally to look at us.

Monfragüe is one of the highlight days of this tour and we were not disappointed.

Thanks to an early breakfast (in Spain this means 8am, far later than we would have liked) and a new road from Trujillo to the park, we were climbing up to Castillo de Monfragüe just after 10am. A pair of Red-billed Choughs was passing as we got out of the buses and a Black Redstart was singing from the cliff top. Rock Bunting proved difficult although we had great views at Peña Falcón later in the day but we had more success with Blue Rock Thrushes.

The view at the top was stunning, especially when Griffons started passing close by. Crag Martins zoomed past in the stiff breeze. Small birds were represented by Chaffinches, a few Linnets and Long-tailed Tits.

Driving through the park we resisted the desire to stop at every likely lay-by but did make a coffee and comfort call in a favourite café of John's. Oh! But we did stop at a site close to a Bonelli's Eagle nest and were successful in seeing one of the pair, watching it for several minutes before it disappeared behind a nearby hill. Its failure to reappear prompted us to look for the bird which was found at the top of a pine but it took off soon afterwards and was not seen again.

Actually, we also stopped at a stand of seeding elms [so much for your resistance to temptation... Ed] where a flock of Hawfinches was feeding, giving up some of their shier traits. We had

wonderful views of this extraordinary finch before driving on to Portilla del Tiétar for our encounters with eagles. Lunch was eaten there, mostly while standing gazing down telescopes and choking as another goodie induced choking (gasping and eating are never compatible).

Returning through the park we stopped to look for Crested Tit. One was found but its appearance coincided with the discovery of three Red Deer and the bird pushed off in the resulting chaos.

A stop at the vast bridge in the middle of the park produced great views of the House Martin colony it hold but none of the hoped-for Alpine Swifts. These had been seen at the eagle-site but poorly zooming among the vultures at a great height.

Moving on, we made our last stop at Peña Falcón where jaws dropped as scores of Griffons were found sitting on ledges or cruising around the cliff top. A lone Peregrine appeared, but at a distance, and the pair of Choughs seen at the castle put in a repeat appearance.

Blue Rock Thrushes and Rock Buntings sang around us, accompanied by Serins and the chattering calls of Crag Martins. Griffons soared past beneath us, ridiculously close, prompting many gasps. A stunning Black Stork imitated them and was admired hugely by everyone, its iridescent green plumage contrasting with red legs and bill.

We can reveal that Tim and John just winked at each other before delaying the return back to the finca by at least 30 minutes. The justification was proved when people asked "Have we really been here an hour," as the time to leave finally came.

A very late afternoon tea was taken with the call-over outside in the finca at 6.45 and we broke up 45 minutes later to get ready for dinner. It had been an exceptional day and we were all delighted with the results of our labours.

Tuesday 4th April

The Cáceres plains and Santa Marta de Magasca

This was another wonderful day spent on the beautiful rolling plains of Extremadura in the company of bustards, sandgrouse, eagles and vultures, plus a pair of Stone Curlews.

We had a late breakfast at 8.30am (the earliest possible time), made our picnics and were away by 9.15.

Our first stop at a delightful corner was marred somewhat by the arrival of another bird group so we left sooner than normal but still after hearing a Quail telling us to 'wet-your-lips.' And seeing two displaying Little Bustards fly in. John called for a Merlin just a little way up the road and we stopped to get reasonable views from the buses.

It might have been this bird which caused a flock of 20 or more Pin-tailed Sandgrouse to fly around in a somewhat nervous manner, reluctant to settle. A pair flew close to us, overhead giving excellent views, so we reaped a benefit from their nervousness.

It was while watching them that a Stone Curlew flew in to join its mate not far from us where the pair provided some of the best views of this elusive species many had seen. A few Montagu's Harriers were displaying and a Tawny Pipit perched on a nearby rock adding to the delight of this purple patch. A few feeding Black-bellied Sandgrouse were admired along with a huge poisonous millipede and a Large Psammodromus before we left for Santa Maria de Magasca.

Our late morning coffee stop was at another of Tim's 'favourite' cafes, each of which appeared to have a doting girlfriend of his behind the bar. To help celebrate our success she cooked a huge golden tortilla clearly made with delicious free-range eggs.

Lunch was eaten soon after at the Rio Magasca where we were entertained by Booted and Short-toed Eagles which drifted past, Green Sandpipers, Kingfishers and Grey Wagtails, Lesser Emperor Dragonflies and Saw-fly Orchids. Extremadura was weaving its magic once again.

Driving onto the verdant and flower-decked plains we made stops to admire lots of colourful Bee-eaters, a large group of Great Bustards, Woodchat and Southern Grey shrikes, a Yellow Wagtail of the blue-headed Iberian race, and a couple of Black-winged Stilts.

But it was the sight of vultures coming in to feed on a carcass which provided one of the trip highlights. The dead animal was close to the road but out of sight, sparing us the more gory details and affording the birds enough privacy to come in straight towards us and land in droves. Most were Griffons but the occasional Black Vulture added to the variety. At times there were 10 in a long line descending rapidly. Occasionally a few would jump into the air squabbling while others sat around the melee watching the action. It was a fascinating sight and 45 minutes slipped away without us noticing Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and Great Bustards flying past (well, the leaders did, but nobody else could be diverted from the main action on this stage of life and death).

Our reason for being on this stretch of road was to look for orchids reputed to be growing on a section of verge but these were never found. A stunning pair of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse was located close to the road and watched with delight and two male Little Bustards displayed for us, but in truth our minds were full of the fantastic sight of feeding vultures and we finally left for home delighted with our day.

Afternoon tea was waiting for us and we did the call-over before a shower. The group assembled again at 8.15pm to drive into Trujillo for dinner, allowing the finca's hard-working staff to have a night off. Our regular restaurant provided us with a large variety of Spanish dishes which became starter and main course before we completed the feast with Magnum ice creams or caramel flan.

Attempts to find Jupiter and bats failed on our return and we had to contend ourselves with views of Orion and a few chilled moths which had been attracted to the lights. Bed finally claimed us at 11.30pm.

Wednesday 5 April

Embalse de Arrocampo, Embalse de Valdecañas, feeding raptors and Jaraicejo

Shirley and Derek had been on this tour with us four years earlier so the leaders decided to take them to a few new sites John had discovered in the interim. A Giant Peacock moth was spotted by Stella as we drove out of the finca and admired by all. This species is the largest moth in Europe and one we see regularly around the finca.

Orchids, uncommon birds and another raptor bonanza were highlights of the day's excursion, despite cold showery weather.

Our first stop just outside Almarez was to investigate a large patch of orchids but a singing Orphean Warbler was a bonus. Naked Man, Mirror and Saw-fly orchids were the centre of attention until the Orphean Warbler started singing. We finally had glimpses of the bird and heard the song well.

The Embalse de Arrocampo was in fine form too with several singing Savi's Warblers watched, good views of an Iberian Chiffchaff, Purple Swamphens gurgling as they picked through the reed and reed-made beds, and lots of Sand Martins. A small group of Snipe had a Jack Snipe among them, a first for this trip, and a Greylag on the lake was another uncommon but welcome find.

Moving to another lobe of the lake we had good flight-views of two or three Little Bitterns and a Squacco Heron made two similar appearances. Three Kingfishers were also seen in flight. A sleeping Black-shouldered Kite was found at one of John's stake-out sites for this species where a squealing Water Rail was also heard.

Lunch was eaten in a charming valley close to the Embalse de Valdecañas where more orchids were examined by John et al while Tim kept watch on a nearby cliff. Two Egyptian Vultures were prospecting for a nest site but there was little other action for his pains. John did better finding Mirror, Naked Man and Yellow Bee orchids.

Better views of Egyptian Vulture were obtained from a lookout high above the reservoir where one of the five birds around even drifted past below us. But it was a stag Roe Deer which stole the show. It was spotted swimming across the vast reservoir and scopes were soon trained on it to watch the marathon. Half way across it suddenly did a U-turn and returned to the spot it had left a few minutes earlier. Roe Deer are uncommon in Extremadura – this was only the second John had seen.

Farmers are encouraged to take their dead animals to a special site near Deleitosa where the carcasses are left out for vultures and other birds to feed on. We gathered above the spot to watch and were fascinated to search through the assembled birds in the area. No carcass was out (that we could see) but scores of birds were drifting around including several Black and Egyptian vultures, Red Kites, Ravens and Griffons. We were admiring these when suddenly a huge cloud of Griffons took off from the escarpment behind us. There were between 250 and 300 birds in the air, an absolutely amazing sight.

As that excitement died down, a Golden Eagle came up over the same hill and drifted towards us giving quite good views before going away down the hill towards Trujillo in the far distance. As we searched for final views through scopes two Short-toed Eagles, one Booted Eagle and a Bonelli's Eagle were seen, although none of the views was brilliant.

The gathering clouds had become quite dark and as lightening began we decided to head back to the finca. The start of our journey was through a cloud-burst but the rain soon stopped and we enjoyed the drive back.

John gave a master-class in orchids as we enjoyed a late cup of tea and then led a walk up the hill to find the finca's by now famous patch of these exotic plants.

Thursday 6 April

Trujillo and Rollers

This was a difficult day for the leaders who were forced to change plans to accommodate bad weather. Flexibility paid off, however, as some great birds were seen.

We started with pre-breakfast birding which was surprisingly productive although the first heavy shower hit us at the furthest point of the walk. But by then we had seen Sardinian Warbler, Wood Lark, Blue Rock Thrush and heard both Cuckoo and Nightingale.

The showers had stopped when we reached Trujillo allowing detailed study of Lesser Kestrel and Pallid Swift. The latter were mixed with Common Swifts above the main square where the sky was full of birds.

After climbing to the castle we dispersed for a spot of shopping, meeting up for a coffee before returning to the finca to eat our picnics. Plans to walk the Tozo Valley were dropped in favour of birding from the buses around Vegas Altas where some early migrants had been seen.

Our first stop to watch White Storks following the plough produced stunning views of Collared Pratincoles which were in the same field. We studied them on the ground and flying so close that their reddish under-wing coverts could be seen clearly.

A distant displaying Great Bustard was close enough to watch its technique for turning into a huge white ball. It paid no attention to a passing tractor so we decided to drive a little closer allowing photographers some great results. Two immature males and seven females were also seen.

The plains were spectacular with great swathes of colour from the various species of flower, The speckled effect made them look like giant impressionist canvasses and several stops for pictures were made. It was on one of these that John found a rare hawk-moth with no common name – *Proserpinus proserpina*.

Birds could be seen on flooded fields and we dropped down to investigate with great views of Gull-billed Tern, Spoonbill and Greenshank as reward. There were scores of Black-winged Stilts but no other waders.

While watching the wetland birds a blue flash was seen so we drove on to an area which had drawn a blank the previous Sunday, To our delight (and relief) Rollers had returned in the interim and we watched two through scopes for a long time. A total of five were seen in an hour which ended with a string of Bee-eaters to add more colour to a brilliant afternoon.

More rain clouds were gathering and as it was approaching 6pm we called it a day and returned to the finca for our now customary cuppa and call-over. This was followed by a session of picture examination as the contents of various digital memory cards were displayed on Tim's laptop.

Friday 7 April

The Belen Plain, Rio Almonte and Cabañas del Castillo

Our last full day in Extremadura was spent exploring the wonderful Belen Plain, Rio Almonte and Cabañas del Castillo, looking for a few species we had not seen so far. It was a great success with Great Spotted Cuckoo, Rock Sparrow, Thekla Lark and Little Owl all being seen well.

We started on the Belen Plain watching Thekla Larks which sang from dry-stone walls next to the buses. We were able to see their more heavily streaked breasts, stouter bills, orange rumps and under-tailed coverts clearly. Hoopoes were flitting around, one pair sparring with a Southern Grey Shrike.

Magpies were numerous and we hoped to see Great Spotted Cuckoos which lay their eggs in the unfortunate birds' nests, but without success. A valley topped with a line of bee-hives had lots of Bee-eaters hawking what few insects were flying in the cold conditions. A stop to watch them resulted in finding three Common Cuckoos and a couple of Rock Sparrows which we watched with delight.

Moving onto the plain we made several stops to watch Little Owls which seemed to pop up in every derelict wall. For some these were the first they had seen and we had great fun watching the tiny birds.

The 'Belen ridge' is famous among Travelling Naturalist guests and our stop on it continued its reputation for great birds. A total of more than 30 Great Bustards were feeding a short distance away, some of the males displaying for their separate harems with gusto.

As we watched them strange noises were heard behind us – the display calls of Little Bustards. One was located and as we watched it the bird suddenly fanned its neck feathers and gave a little leap into the air with its white wings outstretched. John did not believe we had seen this strange event but after watching the bird for several minutes it repeated the display.

"That's the first time I have seen a Little Bustard do that in more than nine years watching," he said with delight. It continued to delight us all for some time before wearying of the task and wandering off.

Champagne orchids were admired and photographed and a melanistic (all black) Montagu's Harrier watched for a while before we set off for a coffee and much needed comfort stop. The 'bar-maid' was one of John's girlfriends but not a patch on those Tim has acquired over the years.

Soon after we stopped at the Rio Almonte to enjoy a birds and picnic lunch with Rock Bunting, Grey and White wagtails, Kingfisher and a few raptors adding spice to our individual finca snacks. A Cirl Bunting sang for us as we left.

A stop higher up the Rio Almonte, at the base of a huge outcrop, saw us drooling over Egyptian Vultures and displaying Short-toed Eagles, Long-tailed Tits and one or two Alpine Swifts high above us.

The road finally petered out at the stunning hill-side village of Cabañas del Castillo where a male Blue Rock Thrush was singing. We were watching him when a male Black Wheatear popped up on a the ridge of a nearby house giving us superb views.

A track around the hill-top was followed until we had magnificent views over the surrounding area. Here in the peace of the high Spanish cliffs we watched our last birds of the trip – Short-toed Eagles, again displaying, Booted Eagles and Egyptian Vultures (we saw six of each by the end of the day).

It was blissful spot to end a stunning week in the wonderful surroundings of wild Extremadura. We returned (the long way) to our finca where again afternoon tea was waiting, despite the fact that the call-over was started at 7pm. It was interrupted by an invitation to join Henri for a farewell reception before dinner. We thanked him and his staff for looking after us so well for the week.

Saturday 8 April

Return to London

Our flights were too early for any birding but late enough for a relaxed start to the journey back to Madrid and the airport's new terminal. All went like clockwork and we checked in after adding Lesser Kestrel and Pallid Swift, Hoopoe and Azure-winged Magpie, Griffon and Black Kite, Cattle Egret and Crested Lark to our day-list.

We said goodbye to John at the airport and enjoyed a fast return to Heathrow where farewells were said and the group parted.

ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

BIRDS

	GREBES	Podicipediformes	Podicipedidae
1	Little grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	
		One on the 1st; two in a pond on the Cáceres plain; one in a pond on the Belen Plain.	
2	Great crested grebe	Podiceps cristatus	
		Scores on the Embalse Sierra Brava, a few on the Embalse de Arrocampo.	
3	Black-necked (Eared) grebe	Podiceps nigricollis	
		Eight on the Embalse Sierra Brava on the 2nd.	
	CORMORANTS	Pelecaniformes	Phalacrocoracidae
4	Great cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	
		Seen on four days, max eight on the 2nd.	
	HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNS	Ciconiiformes	Ardeidae
5	Grey heron	Ardea cinerea	
		Seen daily, max 10 on the .5th.	
6	Purple heron	Ardea purpurea	
		Seen only at the Embalse de Arrocampo.	
7	Little egret	Egretta garzetta	
		A few seen most days.	
8	Squacco heron	Ardeola ralloides	
		One at the Embalse de Arrocampo.	
9	Cattle egret	Bubulcus ibis	
		Common or abundant daily.	
10	Little bittern	Ixobrychus minutus	
		Two, maybe three, at the Embalse de Arrocampo.	
	STORKS	Ciconiiformes	Ciconiidae
11	Black stork	Ciconia nigra	
		Five in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd; on on the 4th.	
12	White stork	Ciconia ciconia	
		Common or abundant daily.	
	IBIS & SPOONBILLS	Ciconiiformes	Threskiornithidae
13	Eurasian spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia	
		One in flooded fields at Vegas Altas on the 6th.	
	WILDFOWL	Anseriformes	Anatidae
14	Greylag goose	Anser anser	
		A lone bird at the Embalse de Arrocampo.	
15	Gadwall	Anas strepera	
		Two pairs on the Magasca plains on the 4th; another pair at the Embalse de Arrocampo.	
16	Common teal	Anas crecca	
		Five at a little pond on the 1st; possibly the same birds at Embalse de Arrocampo on the 5th.	
17	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	
		A few seen most days.	
18	Garganey	Anas querquedula	
		Two drakes on a little pond on the 1st.	

		Heard briefly on the Magasca plains; five heard around Vegas Altas on the 6th.
	RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS	Gruiformes Rallidae
43	Water rail	Rallus aquaticus
		One heard squealing on the 2nd, another on the 5th.
44	Purple swamphen (gallinule)	Porphyrio porphyrio
		Three at the Embalse de Arrocampo on the 1st; 10 on the 5th.
45	Common moorhen	Gallinula chloropus
		A few seen most days.
46	Eurasian coot	Fulica atra
		Seen on only two days.
	BUSTARDS	Gruiformes Otididae
47	Great bustard	Otis tarda
		Eight of these stunning birds, including two displaying males, on the 2nd; 29 on the 4th and an amazing 35 or so on the 7th.
48	Little bustard	Tetrax tetrax
		Two males seen on the 2nd; 10 on the 4th and 7th (including one bird which made little display flights).
	AVOCETS & STILTS	Charadriiformes Recurvirostridae
49	Black-winged stilt	Himantopus himantopus
		A few seen most days.
	THICK-KNEES	Charadriiformes Burhinidae
50	Stone curlew (Eurasian thick-knee)	Burhinus oedicephalus
		A pair seen well on the Magasca plains was one of the trip highlights; two more seen even better on the 6th and three on the 7th.
	COURSERS & PRATINCOLES	Charadriiformes Glareolidae
51	Collared pratincole	Glareola pratincola
		Seen on two days, max 30 on the 6th.
	LAPWINGS & PLOVERS	Charadriiformes Charadriidae
52	Little ringed plover	Charadrius dubius
		Three seen on the 2nd.
	SANDPIPERS	Charadriiformes Scolopacidae
53	Jack snipe	Lymnocyptes minimus
		One at the Embalse de Arrocampo was the 200th species recorded on this holiday over the years.
54	Common snipe	Gallinago gallinago
		Seen on three days, max five on the 5th.
55	Spotted redshank	Tringa erythropus
		One in a little pond on the 1st.
56	Common greenshank	Tringa nebularia
		One in flooded fields at Vegas Altas on the 6th.
57	Green sandpiper	Tringa ochropus
		Seen on three days, max five on the 4th.
58	Common sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos
		A few seen most days.
	GULLS	Charadriiformes Laridae
59	Yellow-legged gull	Larus cachinnans
		One at the Embalse de Arrocampo on the 1st.
60	Lesser black-backed gull	Larus fuscus
		Seven over the Finca Santa Marta on the 2nd; a flock of about 40 on the 6th.
61	Black-headed gull	Larus ridibundus
		A flock of about 40 at our lunch stop on the 2nd.
	TERNs	Charadriiformes Sternidae
62	Gull-billed tern	Sterna nilotica
		One in flooded fields at Vegas Altas on the 6th.
	SANDGROUSE	Pterocliiformes Pteroclididae
63	Pin-tailed sandgrouse	Pterocles alchata

86	Eurasian crag-martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i> Recorded on four days with a max of 60 on the 3rd.
87	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i> Common or abundant daily.
88	Red-rumped swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i> A few seen most days.
89	House martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i> Common or abundant daily.
	WAGTAILS & PIPITS	Passeriformes Motacillidae
90	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i> A few seen most days.
91	Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i> One on the Cáceres plains was of the blue-headed race <i>M. f. iberei</i> .
92	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i> Seen on four days, max two on the 1st and 7th.
93	Tawny pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i> One on the Magascar plains on the 4th.
94	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i> A few seen most days.
	WRENS	Passeriformes Troglodytidae
95	Winter wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> One or two daily.
	THRUSHES	Passeriformes Turdidae
96	Blue rock-thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i> Six in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd; singles on two days, three on the 7th.
97	Eurasian blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i> Common daily.
98	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i> One singing on the 7th was seen only by a leader.
	CISTICOLAS & ALLIES	Passeriformes Cisticolidae
99	Zitting cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i> Common or abundant daily.
	OLD WORLD WARBLERS	Passeriformes Sylviidae
100	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i> A few seen or heard most days.
101	Savi's warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i> Four seen reeling at the Embalse de Arrocampo.
102	Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i> Several singing at the Embalse de Arrocampo.
103	Eurasian reed-warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i> One at our lunch stop on the 2nd; another heard on the 6th.
104	Great reed-warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i> One seen well at our lunch stop on the 2nd.
105	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> Seen or heard on just three occasions.
106	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybeta</i> One or two daily.
107	Iberian chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus iberica</i> One at the Embalse de Arrocampo was seen well.
108	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i> One or two seen on five days.
109	Western orphean warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i> A singing male outside Almarez was seen briefly.
110	Subalpine warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i> One singing in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd.
111	Sardinian warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i> Seen or heard on five days.
112	Dartford warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i> One on the Vegas Altas road on the 2nd.

	OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS	Passeriformes	Muscicapidae
113	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i> One singing in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd; three heard on the 5th.	
114	Common nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i> A few seen or heard most days.	
115	Black redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i> Several in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd; one on the 7th.	
116	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i> Common daily.	
117	Black wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i> Male at Cabanas del Castillio on the 7th.	
118	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> Good numbers seen on four days.	
119	Black-eared wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i> A pair on the Zorita plains on the 2nd, another male seen later.	
	LONG-TAILED TITS	Passeriformes	Aegithalidae
120	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i> Ten in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd; a few on three days thereafter.	
	TITS & CHICKADEES	Passeriformes	Paridae
121	Crested tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i> One in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd.	
122	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i> A few seen most days.	
123	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> A few seen most days.	
	CREEPERS	Passeriformes	Certhiidae
124	Short-toed treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i> A few seen most days.	
	SHRIKES	Passeriformes	Laniidae
125	Southern grey shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i> A few seen most days.	
126	Woodchat shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i> Seen on six days, max 25 on the 4th.	
	JAYS & CROWS	Passeriformes	Corvidae
127	Eurasian jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i> Two in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd; one on the 7th.	
128	Azure-winged magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i> Common or abundant daily.	
129	Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i> Common daily.	
130	Red-billed chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> A pair in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd.	
131	Eurasian jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i> Common or abundant daily.	
132	Common raven	<i>Corvus corax</i> A few seen most days.	
	STARLINGS	Passeriformes	Sturnidae
133	Spotless starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i> Common or abundant daily.	
	OLD WORLD SPARROWS	Passeriformes	Passeridae
134	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i> Common or abundant daily.	
135	Spanish sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> A few seen most days.	
136	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i> Six at our lunch stop on the Vegas Altas road on the 2nd.	
137	Rock petronia (sparrow)	<i>Petronia petronia</i> Three seen on the 7th.	
	WAXBILLS & ALLIES	Passeriformes	Estrildidae

138	Common waxbill	Estrilda astrild	
		Common or abundant almost daily.	
139	Red avadavat	Amandava amandava	
		Common or abundant almost daily.	
	FINCHES	Passeriformes	Fringillidae
140	Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	
		Seen on five days.	
141	European greenfinch	Carduelis chloris	
		Several in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd; at the finca on the 4th and six on the 6th.	
142	Eurasian siskin	Carduelis spinus	
		A small flock at the Finca Santa Marta on the 2nd.	
143	European goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	
		Common daily.	
144	Eurasian linnet	Carduelis cannabina	
		Seen on three days, max six on the .3rd	
145	European serin	Serinus serinus	
		Common or abundant daily.	
146	Hawfinch	Coccothraustes coccothraustes	
		A few seen or heard most days, common at the Finca Santa Marta.	
	TRUE BUNTINGS	Passeriformes	Emberizidae
147	Cirl bunting	Emberiza cirlus	
		A pair at the Finca Santa Marta on the 6th; one singing at the Rio Almonte on the 7th.	
148	Rock bunting	Emberiza cia	
		Three males, one singing in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd; one at the Rio Almonte on the 7th.	
149	Reed bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus	
		Female on the Vegas Altas road on the 2nd.	
150	Corn bunting	Emberiza calandra	
		Abundant; did anyone not see this species?	

MAMMALS

	RABBITS & HARES	Lagomorpha	Leporidae
1	European rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus	
		Seen on two days, max three on the 1st.	
2	Granada Hare	Lepus granatensis	
		A total of five animals seen on three days.	
	OTTERS, WEASELS & BADGERS	Carnivora	Mustelidae
3	European otter	Lutra lutra	
		Droppings at the Rio Almonte on the 7th.	
	MOONRATS & HEDGEHOGS	Lipotyphla	Erinaceidae
4	Western European hedgehog	Erinaceus europaeus	
		Lots 'pancaked' on the roads.	
	MOLES	Lipotyphla	Talpidae
5	Iberian mole	Talpa occidentalis	
		Mole hills seen commonly.	
	PIGS	Artiodactyla	Suidae
6	Wild boar (Feral pig)	Sus scrofa	
		Rootlings at the Finca Santa Marta.	
	DEER	Artiodactyla	Cervidae
7	Red deer (Elk)	Cervus elaphus	
		Four seen in Monfragüe Natural Park on the 3rd.	
8	Western roe deer	Capreolus capreolus	
		A stag swimming across the Embalse de Valdecañas turned back.	

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES

A huge **Common Toad** (*Bufo bufo*) was seen near the Valdecañas Dam on 5th; a **Common Tree Frog** (*Hyla arborea*) was heard at Vegas Altas on 2nd; **Iberian Pool Frog** (*Rana perezi*) was heard quite commonly and seen at FSM on 6th. Despite the generally cool conditions there were a few reptiles: **Moorish Geckos** (*Tarentola mauretanicus*) were at FSM with 1-4 daily on 3rd and from 5th – 7th, plus one in Trujillo on 4th; 3 **Large Psammotromus** (*Psammotromus algirus*) were by the Río Magasca on 4th and a few were in the Valdecañas dam area on the 5th; c. 8 **Spanish Psammotromus** (*Psammotromus hispanicus*) were in pseudosteppe near Santa Marta de Magasca on 4th; the numerous terrapins seen at various sites, especially along the Río Magasca on 4th and lower Río Almonte on 7th were **Spanish Terrapins** (*Mauremys leprosa*).

FISH

Several **Common Carp** (*Cyprinus carpio*) were in the Emb. de Arrocampo on 1st and 5th, plus males chasing females in the Emb. de Sierra Brava on 2nd; 20+ **Barbel** sp. (*Barbus* sp.) were in the Río Magasca on 4th and a few were in the lower Río Almonte on 7th; abundant **Eastern Mosquitofish** (*Gambusia holbrooki*) were at Vegas Altas on 2nd and in the Río Magasca on 4th.

BUTTERFLIES

Spanish Festoon	Six+ various sites on 2 nd and one near the Valdecañas dam on 5 th .
Large White	Two near the Valdecañas dam on 5 th .
Small White	One Vegas Altas on 2 nd , and 1 on 4 th .
Western Dappled White	Several at various sites on 2 nd and 4 th and several lower Río Almonte on 7 th .
Orange-tip	Six+ near the Valdecañas Dam on 5 th and a female lower Río Almonte on 7 th .
Clouded Yellow	Six+ various sites on 2nd, then several daily from 4 th - 7 th .
Small Copper	Singles Vegas Altas on 2 nd , Río Magasca on 4 th , Valdecañas Dam area on 5 th and lower Río Almonte on 7 th .
Holly Blue	Singles FSM on 2 nd and Río Magasca on 4 th .
[Spanish] Brown Argus	<i>Aricia [agestis] cramera</i> One Valdecañas dam area on 5 th .
Common Blue	Two+ Vegas Altas on 2 nd , several by the Río Magasca on 4 th and a few near the Valdecañas dam on 5 th .
Nettle-tree Butterfly	Four or five in the Valdecañas dam area on 5 th .
Red Admiral	Up to three at various sites on five days.
Painted Lady	Singles Santa Marta de Magasca and the Río Magasca on 4 th .
Small Heath	One Río Magasca on 4 th and plenty in the Valdecañas dam area on 5 th .
[Southern] Speckled Wood	Several by the lower Río Almonte on 7 th .
Wall Brown	Two Valdecañas dam area on 5 th .

OTHER TAXA

Included a single stunning **Giant Peacock** moth (*Saturnia pyri*) at FSM on 5th, the **Willowherb Hawkmoth** (*Proserpinus proserpina*) resting on an *Ornithogalum* flowerhead at Vegas Altas on 6th, a few **Pine Processionary** (*Thaumetopoea pityocampa*) caterpillar tents on pines at Vegas Altas on 2nd, caterpillar tents of *Ocnogyna boetica* (and not Grass Processionary *Thaumetopoea herculeana* as thought) in the pseudostepes on 2nd and especially on 4th. Odonata included 2 **Lesser Emperor Dragonfly** (*Anax parthenope*) along the Río Magasca on 4th, a female **Red-veined Darter** (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*) resting on a bar wall at Almaraz on 5th and a **Large Red Damselfly** (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*) near the Valdecañas dam on 5th. Other insects included 3 **Egyptian Grasshopper** (*Anacridium aegyptium*) around Vegas Altas on 2nd, the enormous **Pond Skaters** (*Aquarius najas* – NOT *Gerris* as I'd thought) on the Río Almonte on 7th, a **Violet Carpenter Bee** (*Xylocopa violacea*) at FSM on 2nd, various **Rhinoceros Beetles** (*Copris lunaris*) at FSM on 1st, 2nd and 4th, 10+ **Oil Beetles** (*Meloe* sp.) on the Zorita steppes on 2nd, **Honey Bees** (*Apis mellifera*) at various sites on different days, and the impressive female 'whopping great crane fly' (probably *Tipula maxima*) near the Valdecañas dam on 5th. The only other invertebrates were several

examples of the large, nasty-looking **centipede** (*Scolopendra cingulatus*) on 4th and 7th and dead Red Signal Crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*) at Vegas Altas on 2nd.

SELECTED PLANTS:

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

Pinaceae:	<i>Pinus pinea</i>	Stone / Umbrella Pine	(3)
Fagaceae:	<i>Quercus rotundifolia</i>	Evergreen Oak	(26)
	<i>Quercus suber</i>	Cork Oak	(27)
Ulmaceae:	<i>Ulmus minor</i>	Elm sp.	(c. 38)
	<i>Celtis australis</i>	Southern Nettle Tree	(39)
Aristolochiaceae:	<i>Aristolochia paucinervis</i>	Birthwort sp.	(c. 64)
Caryophyllaceae:	<i>Paronychia argentea</i>	Paronychia (prob. this sp.)	(136)
	<i>Silene colorata</i>	pink catchfly sp.	(180)
Ranunculaceae:	<i>Ranunculus</i> sp.	Water Crowfoot sp.	
	<i>Ranunculus</i> sp.	Buttercup sp.	
Fumariaceae:	<i>Fumaria capreolata</i>	Ramping Fumitory	(303)
Resedaceae:	<i>Sesamoides purpurascens</i>	Sesamoides (a small <i>Reseda</i>)	(c. 378)
Crassulaceae:	<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort	(396)
Leguminosae:	<i>Cercis siliquastrum</i>	Judas Tree	(430)
	<i>Cytisus multiflorus</i>	White Broom	
	<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	Broom	(456)
	<i>Lygos sphaerocarpa</i>	Lygos (common broom-like plant)	(478)
	<i>Lupinus ?hispanicus</i>	Iberian Lupin (prob. this sp.)	(c. 484)
	<i>Astragalus lusitanicus</i>	'Iberian' Milk-vetch	(504)
Geraniaceae:	<i>Geranium molle</i>	Dove's-foot Crane's-bill	
	(741)		
	<i>Erodium botrys</i>	Storks-bill sp.	(758)
Euphorbiaceae:	<i>Mercurialis annua</i>	Annual Mercury	(820)
Thymelaeaceae:	<i>Daphne gnidium</i>	Mediterranean Daphne	(936)
Cistaceae:	<i>Cistus albidus</i>	Grey-leaved Cistus (big pink fls)	(961)
	<i>Cistus salviifolius</i>	Sage-leaved Cistus (small white)	(965)
	<i>Cistus ladanifer</i>	Gum Cistus (big white fls)	(971)
	<i>Tuberaria guttata</i>	Spotted Rockrose (small yellow)	(985)
Cactaceae:	<i>Opuntia maxima</i> (= <i>ficus-indica</i>)	Prickly Pear	(1040)
Ericaceae:	<i>Arbutus unedo</i>	Strawberry Tree	(1176)
	<i>Erica arborea</i>	Tree Heath (pink fls in EX)	(1178)
	<i>Erica lusitanica</i>	Portuguese Heath (white fls)	(1179)
Oleaceae:	<i>Olea europaea</i>	Olive	(1248)
Boraginaceae:	<i>Echium plantagineum</i>	Purple Viper's Bugloss	
	(1383)		

	<i>Borago officinalis</i>	Borage	(1395)
	<i>Anchusa undulata</i>	Undulate Anchusa	(1406)
<u>Labiatae:</u>	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	Rosemary	(1526)
	<i>Lavandula stoechas</i>	French Lavender	(1528)
<u>Scrophularicaea:</u>	<i>Linaria amethystea</i>	'Amethyst' Toadflax	(c. 1614)
	<i>Linaria spartea</i>	a yellow-fl. Toadflax	(c. 1614)
<u>Compositae:</u>	<i>Bellis annua</i>	Annual Daisy (a tiny daisy)	(1791)
	<i>Bellis sylvestris</i>	Southern Daisy (a big 'leggy' daisy)	(1793)
	<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i>	Chamomile	(1884)
	<i>Calendula arvensis</i>	Field Marigold	(1908)
	<i>Silybum marianum</i>	Milk Thistle	(1982)
<u>Liliaceae:</u>	<i>Asphodelus aestivus</i>	Common Asphodel	(2089)
	<i>Fritillaria lusitanica</i>	Iberian Fritillary	(2152)
	<i>Ornithogalum ?narbonense</i>	Star-of-Bethlehem sp.	(2171)
	<i>Hyacinthoides hispanica</i>	Spanish Bluebell	
	<i>Muscari comosum</i>	Tasselled Hyacinth	(2201)
	<i>Narcissus jonquilla</i>	Common Jonquil	(2279)
	<i>Narcissus bulbocodium</i>	Hoop-petticoat Narcissus	(2281)
<u>Iridaceae:</u>	<i>Gymnandris sisyrynchium</i>	Barbary Nut Iris	(2305)
<u>Orchidaceae:</u>	<i>Orchis papilionacea</i>	Pink Butterfly Orchid	(2401)
	<i>Orchis champagneuxii</i>	Champagne Orchid	(2405)
	<i>Orchis conica</i>	Spanish Milky Orchid	(cf. 2408)
	<i>Orchis italica</i>	Italian Man Orchid	(2409)
	<i>Ophrys incubacea</i>	an Early Spider Orchid sp.	(cf. 2428)

This (perhaps surprisingly long) list has been drawn up after some post-trip homework using Blamey & Grey-Wilson's *Med. Wild Flowers*, the 'Flora y vegetación de Extremadura', Polunin & Smythies' 'Guía de campo de las flores de España, Portugal y sudoeste de Francia' and Durán & Rodriguez's 'Guía de arboles y arbustos de Extremadura', thus names to a number of things we didn't get to species level in the field, and a number of species seen by just one or two people. Apologies if I've omitted anything obvious.

AND FINALLY

John and I would like to thank everyone for their great good spirits, camaraderie, humour, sharp eyes and enthusiasm which made leading this trip a delight. We both hope to see you all again on another 'Trav Nats' tour again one day.

Tim Earl, Guernsey & John Muddeman, Madrid April 2006