

Extremadura

24 September – 1 October 2006

Trip Report

Leaders:

John Muddeman

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Introduction

Once again we were able to sample the delights of the wildlife, and particularly birds, of this remarkable corner of Europe. Though some of the breeding species had long gone, we were treated to some great views of 'classic' species, right from the word go, plus saw a terrific number of migrants, especially given that (until just before the trip) it had been the driest year on record to date, despite arriving as the tail end of a hurricane was still sweeping across the region!

Diary

Sunday 24 September

John met Carole and Mark in Terminal 4 and we were soon joined by the rest of the group who'd flown in from London. Since they came through in record time, and it being Sunday afternoon, we soon got the vehicles hired out and were away and around Madrid and heading in the opposite direction to the traffic returning from their weekends away.

The cool breezy conditions and dark cloud were atypical for the season, though it stayed mostly dry on the drive. Turning off onto a side-track we headed for a tip-off site. Indeed, we almost immediately stopped several times to watch a huge number of Red-legged Partridge in the fields close by. A short distance ahead we jumped out for a high passing Eurasian Black Vulture, while we soon switched to scan down over the rolling ground below, where a dark phase Booted Eagle spiralled and sparred with a pair of Common Buzzards. Plenty of small birds in the arable fields included our first Northern Wheatears, Crested Larks, Eurasian Linnets and Corn Buntings, though the icing on the cake was a superb adult Spanish Imperial Eagle, first seen sat on a post, then later on balancing in some broom-like bushes before finally taking flight and disappearing over the horizon. Wow!

Another stop ahead down another track saw us watching a juvenile Black-shouldered Kite dismembering a small rodent on top of an electricity pylon, though after some Common Magpies had given it a hard time, an adult kite came in and after a short pursuit, interrupted several times by the juvenile turning upside down to bare its talons in defence, saw the youngster off! Just for variety single Pied Flycatcher and Whinchat perched periodically on a small fence and a Willow Warblers flitted down onto the edge of the track. Hmm, this start was a bit special!

Time though was rapidly running away, so after a short drinks break we continued straight down to the Finca, arriving just after 8 p.m. Our host, Henri met us in the car park, and once installed in our rooms, we soon readjusted for a short introductory talk about the estate. The accompanying aperitifs and drink were very welcome after a long day's travel for many, and after a fine dinner a good, long night's sleep was had by most.

Monday 25 September

A very inauspicious start with rain and thick cloud cloaking the Finca as we went into breakfast. It looked like midwinter! Not to worry though, since as we came out to get our picnics, so things were brightening and as we headed N, so the cloud was lifting slightly.

Turning towards Santa Marta de Magasca we pulled off for a couple of short walks along the roadside. Pied Flycatchers were abundant, though flighty as ever, a couple of Woodlarks -one in full display flight- were much more confiding though, while Iberian Azure-winged Magpies, a very brief Common Redstart and a Spotted Flycatcher all made first appearances for the group.

Further stops revealed the first of dozens of Northern Wheatears and Whinchats seen during the day, plus a Southern Grey Shrike, Hoopoe, Common Stonechat and a couple of slim Tawny Pipits! A fine selection. Despite a little drizzle, clearer skies were coming from the N and as a breeze picked up so the first raptors started appearing. Three Eurasian Black and an Egyptian Vulture circled round low over a farm, and drifted slowly E, the Blacks dropping down to lounge around in a field near some sheep.

A short drive ahead and we were forced to stop again due to small passerines in the scrub. A few Common Whitethroats were rather elusive, but less so a Melodious Warbler and two Subalpine Warblers, which with patience came out to give us good views in the scopes as they fed among the bushes.

Later we turned onto a broad track. The rather grassy fields on both sides were rather devoid of birds, but we pulled in to a gate entrance with good views both sides and started searching. The patchy cloud gave us good references for passing raptors and this turned out to be crucial, as gradually more and more birds appeared. A small flock of Lesser Kestrels hunted over a nearby field, though never gave really close views. A Black Stork spiralled up distantly with some Griffons, though soon after was eclipsed by a pair of Bonelli's Eagles, which then drifted round high over the area for most of the next hour! More Eurasian Black and Griffon Vultures kept us busy while Ray turned up trumps with first a young Spanish Imperial Eagle, then later a juvenile Golden Eagle! These with a total of three passing pale Booted Eagles meant it was all five Spanish breeding eagles in just a couple of hours! One of the most curious finds though, was a pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse on the ground, with a tiny chick in tow! A terrific find and the third time in 5 years I'd seen this phenomenon in autumn, and which as far as I know has never been described before! After lunch in the field we headed for a local bar (but not until we'd got out to see our first Red Kite), where soft drinks were well appreciated and a few flighty Red-rumped Swallows mixed with House Martins over the rooftops.

Our final main stop was down in the now quite warm valley of the Tamuja river. Once we'd had our fill of the Crag Martins wheeling around, we switched our attention downwards! Pools in the riverbed were attractive to birds, including several Grey Herons and a White Wagtail (plus Spanish Terrapins hauled out on stones), while the adjacent scrub was cover to both migrant and residents. A male Blue Rock Thrush was probably the star bird, but we also noted Pied Flycatchers, Common Redstarts, Sardinian Warblers and Spotted Flycatcher. Two Kingfishers raced towards us, one passing underneath, the other turning and speeding away downstream showing off its electric blue back. The various dragonflies below us included Blue and Lesser Emperors, Broad Scarlet and numerous Red-veined Darters.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent driving through the Cáceres plains. This was rather hot and exposed, but the breeze kept things cooler and bearable. Whinchats and Northern Wheatears continued by the dozen, but a chance stop for a Yellow Wagtail revealed an odd-looking bird crouched among the stones. An Ortolan Bunting! Not only that, but when the first bus backed up to see it, so another, a male in near perfect plumage, flew in to join it!

We finished with a stop in open steppe with tremendous views almost all around. A lack of new species was completely irrelevant here as we looked for miles and miles in all directions in clear air. A wonderful sight.

The drive back was briefly punctuated by stopping for a group of 7 Great Bustards off to one side but we didn't linger long on the roadside having been warned about stopping by the Civil Guard earlier!

Tuesday 26 September

The day dawned crystal clear and cloudless, and remained that way until dusk. Indeed, the heat and lack of breeze meant it felt considerably hotter than the day before and despite getting back to the Finca 'early', we still saw over 20 species new for the trip!

Heading S we stopped in some open steppe when a Great Bustard flew over in front. Ray then spotted some Little Bustards in flight just after pulling in, and we finally relocated these despite the large distance. However, after watching for some time we suddenly realised that not only were there a lot more, but also 19 Great Bustards along the near horizon! A few passing Calandra Larks and a flock of Corn Buntings on the field behind were noted by a few.

The bustards were too distant though, so we headed S and turned off onto a quiet side road. Stopping at a strategic spot we flushed a Little Owl from its perching site, though it landed on some rocks nearby, remaining in view just long enough for scope views for the quick! Opposite though, no less than 14 Great Bustards sat or stood quietly in the rough grass and rocks, keeping an eye on us, but remaining unperturbed. A lovely sight.

The Sierra Brava reservoir may be quite recent in making, but is remarkably good for birds. The plentiful wildfowl present were almost all Mallard, but a few Gadwall and a single Common Teal were also noted. Great Crested Grebes and lots of Eurasian Coots were scattered around, while just three rather distant Black-necked Grebes were also present. A juvenile Black Tern eluded most, but not so the three Western Marsh Harriers which crossed the reservoir from NW to SE, nor the Sand Martins, though most of these were admittedly either high or distant.

Stopping for a soaring Black Stork beside an irrigation channel proved to be a fine choice, not only for excellent views of this bird, despite two more later on (!), but also for passing Griffon and Eurasian Black Vultures, numerous Jackdaws and Common Ravens and even a Great Cormorant below us in a pool. Heading towards a possible lunch spot a squeak off to one side revealed several fine male Red Avadavats in breeding plumage, plus a few Common Waxbills, and after patient waiting, with a pair of Common Stonechats and a few Zitting Cisticolas to help pass the time, we eventually had fine views of both of these diminutive invaders.

Time was running away and the heat soaring, but entering the rice fields found us watching Southern Grey Shrike, Willow Warbler and another brief Common Whitethroat on a fence. A large flock of sparrows ahead refused to show, like the adjacent singing Cetti's Warbler, so we took a track into the rice fields and headed for a large pool. This was a treat and was teeming with birds, one of the first seen being a Ruddy Shelduck! In fact we saw several new species here, including a juvenile Reeve (= female Ruff) and several Common Snipe and Northern Pintail.

After failing to exit along one track we eventually made it back out onto the 'road' and headed for some shade. However some shapes off to one side in rough grass turned out to be a small flock of Little Bustards, and by far the closest we'd seen so far!

Lunch was finally taken in a lovely spot under some *Eucalyptus*, despite the unwanted attentions of a rather surly civil guard, and we finished off nearby with a short walk to a river, which revealed little except a briefly perched Kingfisher and a bat flying around! However a few insects revelling in the heat included a couple of Mediterranean Skippers and an African Grass Blue -both excellent scarce butterflies- plus a fine adult Common Tree-frog. A line of Cattle Egrets along a fence rounded things off nicely.

Wednesday 27 September

A day in Monfragüe. However, we started a fraction late and after refuelling, the temperature was already into the low 20s! Nothing however broke the drive up to the park, despite a couple of circling Red Kites off to one side.

Turning off the road we climbed steeply up towards the castle car park. Parking in the shade cast by a pair of fine Southern Nettle Trees we stepped out to be met by the sight of hundreds of House Martins, plus a smattering of Red-rumped Swallows and Crag Martins, resting on a wire overhead and wheeling around in front of the rock face above us. A Rock Sparrow shreeped from a tree, then flew into a bush in front of a cave, giving fine scope views. A Blue Rock Thrush gave brief views, despite singing well.

Climbing up we soon noticed some birds feeding on the ground under the trees, and we quickly enjoyed the sight of a couple of superb Hawfinches, several Chaffinches and a European Robin in the scopes.

We finally made it to the castle and spent the next hour or so watching birds and also contemplating some fine views out to the south over the vast area of dehesa rolling back to Trujillo and over the scrubby hills to the N. Dozens of House and Crag Martins wheeled around in front and lots of Griffon Vultures circled in front of Peñafalcón. Two Black Redstarts counter sang from below us but steadfastly failed to show, unlike a passing Eurasian Jay down towards the river. Numerous passing Red-rumped Swallows kept our eyes busy, too. We stuck it out until the heat finally got to us, then worked our way down to the vans.

One of the 'target' species was missing though, but fortunately when we started watching the towering cliffs of Peñafalcón from the car park, we soon got to grips with this speciality, when a smart White-rumped Swift swept across the rock face and shot straight into its nest! That of a Red-rumped Swallow to be more precise, and this was repeated later on, despite also briefly seeing a pair way above over our heads circling round a nearer peak. We watched the antics of the abundant Griffons and a stunningly black juvenile Eurasian Black Vulture present, plus a singing male Black Redstart peering round the corner of a cliff fun to see.

We finally pulled ourselves away and headed round to some picnic tables near a little spring for lunch. In fact, as we arrived, a Hawfinch flew in for a drink, being followed in quick succession by a European Robin and Great and Blue Tits. Lunch was entertaining, especially given the numerous Pied Flycatchers busy in the trees and the Crag Martins wheeling around close by underneath the bridge.

An ice-cream break was a must, but it was so hot afterwards that we decided to call it a day in the park and head back earlier. However, a couple of stops at pools near Trujillo revealed several new birds, including a couple of Little Grebes and no less than 10 Green Sandpipers at one smelly site, plus 14 Little Grebes at another! Several Little Ringed Plovers and White Wagtails also gave fine views, with a Crested Lark chasing a rabbit though the rocks at one point a bizarre sight!

After the call-over we rounded off with a stroll up through Henri's orchards for an hour in lovely cooling conditions. Birds were literally almost absent, but it was lovely up on the hill, with some terrific views over the surrounding scenery.

Thursday 28 September

In order to beat the heat we took an early morning drive out in the hopes of finding sandgrouse. Our 7:30 departure meant we left in the dark, but it was fun to see how the landscape emerged as the light came up. Thick cloud and a chill breeze were somewhat unexpected though!

A few Northern Wheatears, Whinchats and 'pipping' Corn Buntings were noted on wires, but were flighty, but *not* so a superb Little Owl which remarkably clung to the top wire at just a couple of yards range as we stopped beside it. Perhaps it was sheltered from the breeze?!

Further scans revealed little except for yet more Northern Wheatears and Whinchats on fences, plus speeding Corn Buntings and distant Lapwings, but this was not too surprising given that the fields had been reduced to virtually bare soil by the hordes of grazing sheep, and this despite a fine haze of green already forming after the weekend's rains.

Things were not looking too positive, but another stop by a thistly field saw Terry calling out that there was a plover-like bird walking around. A quick check with the scopes and the surprise of the day (and the week?) in the form of a superb Eurasian Dotterel was watched feeding in the parched fallow! We watched this at length, being out long enough to also see a passing female Hen Harrier and three very distant Great Bustards. An even greater surprise though, was when another Eurasian Dotterel flew in from behind us calling, and the first took off to join it!

It was feeling cold though in the breeze and thick cloud over the hills opposite did not bode well for much change. However, we moved on to a final field in our quest and started scanning. Several sandgrouse came up from in front and wheeled round, showing their black bellies, then dropped in again, so we moved ahead to get a better view. Three groups of 8, 5 and 3 Black-bellied Sandgrouse got up and headed off to quieter spots, giving good views, but the hoped-for pin-tails made absolutely no showing, so we headed back for a late breakfast.

After breakfast we headed to Trujillo and walked around and took a look at the street market. Though 'tat' sums-up the quality of most of the goods, the sunny cool conditions were great to enjoy the atmosphere!

A quick trip to the Trujillo fishpond on the way out saw us finding a Dunlin, our first ever in autumn, though we soon headed up the motorway and had lunch near the buses by the Rio Tozo. Raptors were immediately in evidence, including passing Booted and Short-toed Eagles as well as the usual vulture duo. "Luncheon vultures", perhaps??!

The walk along the river was in quite hot conditions, with pauses for passing raptors, Willow Warblers, Pied and a Spotted Flycatcher and a few dragonflies. Unfortunately the reservoir itself had been disturbed by 2 fishermen, and though a mixed group of duck and some resting waders were close by as we arrived, these took off in fright before we could react. And didn't return... More passing raptors, 2 Black Storks overhead, Pied Flycatchers and a calling Short-toed Treecreeper kept us busy though, and it was lovely being deep in the *dehesa* and away from the world.

The walk back was punctuated by a series of stops, especially for dragonflies along the rather turbid trickle of the river. While this may not be to everyone's taste, some spectacular species were present including a few male Purple Drop-wing, male Lesser Emperors, an egg-laying female Blue Emperor, male Epaulet Skimmer and a brief male Long Skimmer, a rare European and very scarce Spanish species. Damselflies were present too, including the quite large Western Willow Emerald and tiny Iberian Bluet. Red Signal Crayfish crept stealthily upstream through the murky waters, failing to remain hidden in the shallows.

We returned via the Belén Plain and tracks. Almost nothing was seen on the rather hot and scorched-looking plains, but down a side track we hit the jackpot when a Wryneck, perched on a track-side rock, froze, allowing both vehicles to stop, and only then flew up to perch on a nearby wall to sit in full view! A terrific find! It then flew into a bush where it hid for some time before eventually moving off. Not before we'd noted a Black Stork passing over though!

Not far ahead a crested lark jumped up off the track, but its rufous uppertail coverts gave it away as a Thekla Lark. However it dropped down into a grassy field and remained invisible, despite singing quietly. Ray, not to be outdone though, waited patiently back on the track and soon relocated a fine individual as it crept out to forage on the gravel edges. In fact, it fed quietly and unconcernedly for some time, allowing excellent views to all and quite a close approach for the photographers. A fine end to the day's birdwatching.

It is certainly not all over though since we finished with a fine meal at a local restaurant in Trujillo.

Friday 29 September

It dawned perfectly clear and sunny again, but started to cloud over even before we'd left, remaining partly cloudy for most of the day and providing relief from the hot temperatures likely.

The Arrocampo reservoir was difficult viewing given tall reedmace growth, but persistence is a virtue. Indeed, some high whistles revealed a Penduline Tit was close by, and we saw it fly over. A great start! Three more later on were difficult to spot in the vegetation, though most managed views. Plentiful squeaks and grunts from the thick vegetation gave away the presence of Purple Swamp-hens, but sadly not one showed. However, the wait did produce numerous hunting Western Marsh Harriers, passing Grey Herons and a small flock of Spoonbills in flight, a distant Osprey on a pylon, Spanish Sparrows in the scrub and for variety, plentiful Long Skimmer dragonflies sunning themselves in the vegetation. Cetti's Warblers shouted from the thickets and some unseen Eurasian Reed Warblers scolded from the reedmace.

We finally moved on to another site nearby, also pulling a blank on the swamp-hens, though two Tree Pipits flew over calling and perched distantly on a fence. A Northern Shoveler swam across a channel in front and a Bluethroat flushed from the low ground cover and flew round in front showing off its orange tail-base patches.

Taking a side road we stopped to look at Little and Cattle Egrets adjacent to a farm pond with 'dodgy' geese, only to find a fine winter-plumage Squacco Heron walking round the bare edge of the pool! An

excellent find. Only bettered when we noticed a Black-shouldered Kite flying behind it, which then perched in the top of a dead tree!

A small lake nearby at first sight seemed rather dull, with just a few Mallard and a Great Crested Grebe, but the adjacent bushes held Spanish Sparrows, Spotless Starlings, Iberian Azure-winged Magpies, a couple of Common Redstarts, Southern Grey Shrike, Pied Flycatchers and Common Stonechats, and this kept us busy! A Kingfisher flew in and perched in the reedmace, and after a little manoeuvring we soon had wonderful extended views of this gem, fishing quietly on the edge of the lake. Three Northern Shoveler also appeared, Ruff and Green Sandpiper were noted in flight and things were looking excellent! In fact, with a constant movement of close Eurasian Black and Griffon Vultures, plus a few Common Buzzards and Western Marsh Harriers, we stayed for lunch in the warm and pleasant conditions.

Leaving, we noted single Green Sandpiper and Common Snipe in a small pool, and followed this up with another unsuccessful stop to try and see swamp-hens, finally settling for a drinks break in a local bar.

We finished off by heading into some hills. The breeze again kept things very pleasant. Taking a look over the Valdecañas reservoir only revealed a few Great Cormorants and Great Crested Grebes, despite passing raptors including numerous vultures.

A look at a nearby quarry and rock outcrops was unsuccessful for our 'quarry', though the remarkable discovery of a 'roosting' horseshoe bat was a highlight for many. The poor animal was probably too hot and moving about in a small cave-like structure in the hillside.

The Finca once again turned up a surprise with our first European Serins of the trip during the call-over, and good views of these, plus Rock Sparrows and Sardinian Warblers for several of the party afterwards.

Saturday 30 September

Our last full day started with a pre-breakfast excursion for most. Under a pall of thick cloud it was mild and almost still though and so there was plenty of activity on the steppes where we started.

Three huge Great Bustards stood in the middle of a sheep field, looking somewhat too obvious, and flew when disturbed by some passing cars to reveal the huge areas of white in their plumage. A Little Owl adorned the top of a small building, Northern Wheatears flitted on and off the fences and numerous Corn Buntings sped across the steppes, seemingly unhappy wherever they landed and moving on again. Crested Larks sang and there seemed to be something happening continuously. A distant bird preening on a rock caught John and David's eyes, and a fine and notably dark male Merlin was found on a rock. Good views were obtained in the scope before it finally suddenly powered off, despite being seen again later perched in the middle of another field! Despite a relative lack of variety, we were occupied until late, and even as we turned back onto the road, so a fine Griffon Vulture perched on a rock in the dehesa caught our eye. A pair of Thekla Larks were also at point blank range in front of the front bus and also gave terrific views. After a short pause at the final stop where JM had a close shave with a local farmer (nuff sed!!) we headed back for a leisurely breakfast.

In fact, we didn't leave again until late and so headed into the hills past Madroñera. Wanting to get to a couple of sites before lunch meant pushing on through the hills along bumpy winding roads, but we finally stopped by the Río Almonte for a look along the valley from a fine old bridge. A Common Blue butterfly fluttering over the stones was our first, and one of the few butterflies out in the warm but very overcast conditions. Birds seemed very quiet at first, despite the usual, though ever-impressive, overhead procession of Eurasian Black and Griffon Vultures, but bit by bit we teased out a few things of note. A Black Redstart fed from the walls of a ruined farm, a Sparrowhawk circled up over the dehesa upstream, another drifted along the hilltop opposite and a few small birds started calling in the scrub on the slopes on the opposite side of the river. The permanent deep water here was obviously crucial to the river life including the abundant frogs and fish seen by a few, and also to a Kingfisher which sped downstream before trying to hide unsuccessfully in bankside trees.

Walking down onto the broad gravel bed adjacent to the river we started to see some of the passerines in the scrub opposite. A flock of Long-tailed Tits provided a change from the usual Pied Flycatchers,

while several Blackcaps, single female Chaffinch and Cirl Bunting, Great and Blue Tits and a Common Whitethroat or two kept us busy.

We finally dragged ourselves away and headed towards the Villuercas mountains. As we disembarked by the Río Almonte again, this time upstream, so we noted how the still conditions had pulled a large flock of Crag Martins into the sheltered valley, while a sadly sick-looking Griffon Vulture crashed through the scrub just opposite and down onto a rock overlooking the stream where it stayed, looking rather morose, all afternoon. A Great Spotted Woodpecker on a wooden post was the first for some of the group.

Lunch was taken here, watching the antics of the birds overhead, which as we finished included a young Short-toed Eagle noisily pursuing an adult, before returning and clumsily practising hovering over the slopes, plus a fine female Cirl Bunting which perched openly in the top of a dying tree for all to admire.

We rounded off our afternoon with a trip to Cabañas del Castillo, and a male Peregrine passing overhead in pursuit flight shortly after we arrived was a good omen. A pair of Hawfinches flew off down a street as we walked in and the first of several Blue Rock Thrushes flew off a roof to the rock outcrop looming over the village.

A calling Short-toed Treecreeper in a square managed to elude us, so we walked past the church and round to the gap between the rocks for more views. And stunning views they were, down into the next valley stretching away to the south, both ridges crested with a broken line of quartzite outcrops, like gigantic backbones.

The wind here didn't deem well, but our usual patience was again rewarded with a couple of Blue Rock Thrushes, two Black Redstarts and finally, when we thought our luck had run out, a superb male Black Wheatear. Shortly after this had disappeared again so Mark noted a fine male Rock Bunting in the crag, though it disappeared without trace moments later. Walking back produced a large female Peregrine passing over, presumably the mate to the tiercel seen earlier.

Intermittent light rain than started just as we were leaving, getting heavy at times on the open plains. Our return was along part of the same route as before, with Aldeacentenera successfully negotiated and despite the occasional rain, the Belén plain this time was simply alive with birds. Flocks of Northern Lapwings, Spotless Starlings, House and Spanish Sparrows, Corn Buntings and plenty of Calandra Larks made it fascinating to see the difference compared with the hot afternoon when we'd passed before. Two groups of 3 Great Bustards graced a stubble field at one point, while no less than 39 were present distantly at another. A Merlin also made several high speed passes over the steppes searching for prey, causing panic among the smaller birds.

We arrived back quite late, not helped by roadworks in Belén village with no diversion signs to help us through the maze of the back streets, while the call-over was just completed in time to rush indoors as a sharp shower started to fall!

Another fine meal and review of Mark's photos rounded off our last full day.

Sunday 2 October

We left just after 10, having bade our farewells to the Finca staff and headed off through the steppe and holm oak dehesa so characteristic of the area. Our target for the short time we had left was the northern part of Monfrague near the Rio Tietar. We stopped near an area of pines and within seconds found a Rock Sparrow which promptly flew off leaving us to admire a Crested Tit which appeared close to us! This bird was restless but we even enjoyed the sight of this feeding via binoculars and telescope. A Greenfinch called nearby and Hawfinches were seen making their exit over the trees. We then moved to our final viewpoint of the trip to study the Tietar crag. Several Griffon Vultures were sitting around on the rocks whilst 2 male Blue Rock Thrushes battled in song. Jays were busy collecting acorns on the far side when two small birds flew across toward us, they landed just behind and most of the group enjoyed good views of a pair of Rock Buntings. Meanwhile below us a Kingfisher landed in view on the far bank and at least 15 Blackcaps passed by all heading in the same direction, exit stage left! There were plenty of Great Cormorants either sitting or flying by as we gathered to start lunch. A Firecrest was heard calling from deep cover but after a short time this bird

perched in full view for us to fully enjoy. After lunch we set off and a few Red Deer were noted and once on the main road a few flying raptors kept us busy. We reached the airport a little late but still in plenty of time and said our farewells.

We would like to express our thanks again for making this such a marvellously enjoyable trip [JM in particular regarding his imminent schedule!]. Extremadura is not a typical destination in autumn, but the resident and migrant species often give fine repeated views, such as the Iberian Azure-winged Magpies at the Finca and Black and Griffon Vultures at so many sites. The final tally revealed that the time of year a varied weather had aided us in finding a total of 131 birds species during the visit, with terrific views of the majority of the local specialities, and even added no less than eight new species to the cumulative list, including such scarcities as Ruddy Shelduck and Eurasian Dotterel, a late migrant in the form of Ortolan Bunting, and early arriving winter visitors in the guise of Northern Pintail and Bluethroat. A really marvellous selection! We have also omitted mentioning where we had stunning views of both the two adult Spanish Imperial Eagles and non-Monfragüe White-rumped Swifts for safety reasons. I'm certain that these memories will however remain vividly with you for a long time.

Our very best wishes and we look forward to seeing you again.

SPECIES CHECKLIST

BIRDS

This is the combined list for the whole group. H = heard only; * = New species for tour; Emb. = Embalse (reservoir); FSM = Finca Santa Marta; R. = Río (river); ESB = Emb. De Sierra Brava; Tr = Trujillo; CA = Cerro Alto; MRF = Madrigalejo rice fields; BP = Belen Plains; CdeC = Cabanas del Castillo; ZS = Zorita Steppes; Mon = Monfrague; SMM = Sta. Marta de Magasca; V = Valdecanas; RA = Rio Almonte.

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Seen on three days with a maximum count of 35 on the 28 th
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Only recorded on two dates with a maximum of 16 seen on the 29 th
Black-necked (Eared) Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Three seen on the 26 th at ESB
(Great) Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>	A maximum count of 50 at Mon on the 1 st , smaller numbers seen on four other days
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Observed daily with the highest number of 20 on the 29 th
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	Good views of an individual near a farm pond on the 29 th being the only record
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Highest count of 90 achieved on the 26 th with smaller numbers on two other days
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Recorded on four dates with a maximum of ten on the 29 th
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Good passage noted over five days and 4 birds were seen on the 28 th
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	At least 50 recorded near MRF on the 26 th
*(Eurasian) Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	Thirty-three heading south on the 25 th passing over FSM and five seen on one other day at Emb.Arrocampo
*Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	Two found on a small remote lake were a nice surprise on the 26 th
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Recorded daily with at least 35 seen on the 25 th
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	At least 15 seen on the 26 th at ESB with four recorded on the 29 th elsewhere
*(Northern) Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Six found on a small remote lake on the 26 th were the only birds seen
(Common) Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Observed on 3 dates with a max count of 11 on the 26 th
(Northern) Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Four recorded on only one day, the 29 th
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	At least 4 seen during our drive along the A5 on our way to FSM on

Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	the 24 th . Singles seen on two other dates
Eurasian Black / Monk Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Recorded most days with 15 seen on the 29 th
(Eurasian) Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Observed every day with the maximum count of 30 on the 29 th
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Common and seen in good numbers most days
*Osprey	<i>Pandion heliaetus</i>	One sub-adult seen at SMM on the 25 th
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	One bird sitting on a pylon was a good record on the 29 th
Hen (Northern) Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Maximum count of 5 on the 29 th with birds seen on 3 other dates including one bird carrying a snake
(Eurasian) Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Female hunting over the Caceres Steppes on the 28 th
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Recorded on two dates with 6+ on the 26 th & 10 on the 29 th
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Seen on three dates with a maximum count of 3 birds on the 27 th
Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>	Observed daily in small numbers with seven being the highest day count
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Adult seen on 24 th near the A5, 2 juv at SMM on the 25 th , 1 juv over FSM on 26 th
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>	plus a pair seen at another site
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	A first year bird over SMM on the 25 th
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	A pair over SMM on the 25 th
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Recorded on 4 days with a maximum of 5 seen on the 25 th
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Small group of 5 hunting over SMM on the 25 th and a single seen on the 30 th
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrine</i>	Observed most days in small numbers
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Male hunting over SMM and another over BP on the 30 th
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	A pair recorded on the 30 th at CdeC
Purple Gallinule (Swamp-hen)	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	50+ next to the A5 on the 24 th and 5 seen elsewhere on the 27 th
Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Two on the 26 th and up to 4 seen on the 29 th
Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>	Heard only
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	Observed on 4 days with a maximum of 40 on the 27 th
*(Eurasian) Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	Groups of 50 and 12 seen at ZS on the 26 th
(Northern) Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Seven at Caceres Plain on 25 th , 21 & 14 at ZS on 26 th , 5 at Caceres Plains on 28 th , 13 at SMM & 45 at BP on 30 th and 7 near the A5 on the 1 st
*Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Two birds at the Caceres Plains on the 28 th was a magnificent find
Reeve	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	Seen most days with a maximum exceeding 100 on the 25 th
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Single found on a pool in Tr on the 28 th
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Found on a small remote lake were a nice surprise on the 26 th
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Seen on 4 days with max count of 10 on the 27 th at a foul-smelling pond on the outskirts of Tr
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleuca</i>	Three seen briefly near the Rio Tozo on the 28 th
(Common) Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Recorded on 5 days with max of 10 on the 27 th at the foul-smelling pond on the outskirts of Tr
		Observed on 4 days with a maximum of 3 on the 26 th
		Nine on the 26 th was a good count with singles seen on two other days

Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Four on the 26 th at ESB were the only birds seen
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Only recorded on three days with the best count of 30+ on the 29 th
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Single juvenile seen over ESB on the 26 th
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>	Pr with chick at SMM plus 15 at Caceres Plain on the 25 th . 16+ at Caceres Plain on the 28 th
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Common and recorded daily
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	Three seen close to the A5 on the 24 th
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Ten+ on the 24 th and singles on the 29 th & 30 th
(Eurasian) Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Common and recorded daily
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Seen on three days with maximum count of 3 on the 28 th
(African) White-rumped Swift	<i>Apus affe</i>	Active nest at Mon plus 2 individuals. Three birds found at other sites
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Enjoyed on three days with 2 seen on the 25 th & 29 th
(Eurasian) Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Recorded most days with at least 10 seen on the 26 th & 30 th
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Observed on several days with the maximum count of 3 birds on the 30 th
Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	A superb find close to the vehicles as we travelled over the Belen Plains on the 28 th
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Decent sized flocks of 50-80 birds seen on 4 dates
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Common, widespread and noted every day
Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	Only recorded in small numbers on 3 dates
Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	Seen or heard on most days during the week
European Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Record of 10+ on one day only at ESB
(Eurasian) Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>	Observed most days with a maximum of six on the 25 th
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Only seen on 2 days in very small numbers
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	Recorded most days with a maximum of 10+ on the 26 th
(Common) House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Common and widespread with hundreds seen on 4 dates
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Observed on 6 days with at least 8 on the 26 th
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	Seen on most days in small numbers
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Regular at FSM with small numbers at other sites
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	Five on the 25 th & 2 on the 30 th around SMM
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Two near the Emb.Arrocampo on the 29 th
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Seen daily with max of 8 on the 26 th
(Winter) Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodyte</i>	Singles seen on only two dates
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Recorded on four days with a maximum of five seen on the 30 th
(Common) Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Found on most days with at least 5 on the 25 th & 29 th
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Three on the 27 th and four on the 30 th were the only records
(Eurasian) Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Observed on only 3 days with maximum of 2 seen on two dates
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	One seen briefly at Emb.Arrocampo on the 29 th
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Two on the 27 th and three on the 30 th
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Recorded on 4 days in small numbers with 3 on the 25 th being the maximum

Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Observed most days with marked passage on the 25 th when a total exceeding 40 were seen at various sites
(Common) Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Seen daily with a maximum count of 12 on the 26 th
Black Wheatear Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i> <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	A (well deserved) male on the 30 th at CdeC Recorded most days with marked passage on the 25 th when a total exceeding 100 were seen
Fan-tailed Warbler Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i> <i>Cettia cetti</i>	At least six near MRF were seen on the 26 th Heard on three days but one was seen on the 29 th
(Eurasian) Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	Two seen briefly at the Emb.Arrocampo on the 29 th
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	Singles recorded on the 25 th at SMM and the 27 th at FSM
Willow Warbler Blackcap	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Seen daily, maximum of 15 the on 26 th Singles on 2 days, then 11 on 30 th & 15 on 1 st
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Recorded on 3 days with five seen on the 26 th
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Observed on most days with three located on the 25 th and 29 th
Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	Two, including a fine male were found on the 25 th at SMM
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>	Stunning views of one bird which finally emerged from hiding at Mon on the 1 st
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Only seen on four days with three birds found on the 26 th
Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	Recorded daily with 15 being the highest number on the 26 th
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Small numbers seen on the 25 th & 27 th with the highest count of 15 on the 30 th
(Eurasian) Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	Normally a difficult species to see but we had superb views of 3 on the 29 th at Emb.Arrocampo!
Crested Tit Great Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i> <i>Parus major</i>	A very obliging individual at Mon on the 1 st Seen on most days with a maximum of 5 on 3 dates
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	Seen most days with a maximum of 5 on the 26 th
Eurasian Nuthatch Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Sitta europaea</i> <i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	Heard only on the 27 th and 30 th Recorded on most days with 2 seen on the 27 th , 29 th & 30 th
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Observed on two days with 5 on the 27 th and at least 6 on the 1 st at Mon
Iberian Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	Common & widespread, seen daily in good numbers
(Black-billed) Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Common & widespread, seen daily in good numbers
(Western) Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Seen most days with highest numbers on the 26 th
(Common) Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Recorded on most days with 25 seen on the 26 th & 29 th
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Common & widespread, observed in some groups in excess of 1,000
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	Seen daily with at least one flock of 100 on the 26 th
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Male on the 30 th at CdeC & a pair at Mon on the 1 st
*Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortelana</i>	Two colourful males were a nice surprise on the Caceres Plains on the 5 th

Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirulus</i>	One female on the 27 th and two on the 30 th were the only birds seen
(Common) Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Recorded in small numbers on 2 days with the highest count of 10 on the 1 st
(European) Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	At least 20 flying over FSM on the 29 th & 2 seen at Mon on the 1 st
(European) Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	Heard only at Mon on the 1 st
(European) Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Small numbers seen on 4 dates, maximum of 6 on the 26 th
(Common) Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Small numbers seen on three dates
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Recorded on most days with a maximum of 8 on the 27 th . Seen almost daily at FSM
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	At least 5 at MRF on the 26 th
Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>	At least 6 at MRF on the 26 th and 2 on the 29 th at Emb.Arrocampo
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Common & widespread, seen daily in good numbers
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Our first good views were at Emb.Arrocampo on the 29 th with more on the 30 th at BP
Rock Sparrow (Petronia)	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	Recorded on 4 days with the maximum count of 12 on the 28 th

MAMMALS

Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Evidence on the 25 th
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	Lots in Tr on 28 th
Greater Horseshoe Bat	<i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i>	One roosting in a small building near V on the 29 th
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	One alive on the 30 th and one dead on the 1 st
Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	One found dead on the 26 th
European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	One seen at Mon on the 27 th
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Seen on 5 days at various sites
Beech Marten	<i>Martes foina</i>	Scat found on the 30 th
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Recorded on 3 days in small numbers

AMPHIBIANS

Common Tree Frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>	One on the 26 th
Iberian Water Frog	<i>Rana perezi</i>	Seen on 3 days

REPTILES

Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauretanic</i>	Recorded on 3 days
Large Psammmodromus	<i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>	One on the 26 th
Spanish Psammmodromus	<i>Psammmodromus hispanicus</i>	Two on the 25 th
Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanicus</i>	One on the 25 th
Spanish Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>	Few on the 25 th but lots on the 27 th & 28 th

FISH

Mosquito Fish	<i>Gambusia affinis</i>	Lots seen on the 26 th
Common Carp	<i>Carpus carpio</i>	Recorded at Mon on the 27 th & 1 st
Sun Perch		Seen on the 26 th

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	Recorded on 3 days
Small White	<i>Artogeia rapae</i>	Observed on 3 days
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>	Seen on 5 days
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	Found on 4 days
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>	Seen on 2 days
African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna</i>	A ragged example of this rare species was seen on the 26 th at MRF

Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	One on the 1 st at Mon
(Spanish) Brown Argus	<i>Aricia [agestis] cramera</i>	Counted on 3 days
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Recorded once on the 30 th
Cardinal	<i>Argynnis Pandora</i>	Seen on 4 days with a maximum count of 6 on the 28 th
Great Banded Grayling	<i>Brintesia circe</i>	One on the 28 th
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	Seen in good numbers on 5 days
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	One recorded at MRF on the 26 th
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	One observed on the 26 th
Mediterranean Skipper	<i>Gegenes nostradamus</i>	One photographed on the 26 th
MOTHS		
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>	Up to 2 seen at FSM on the 28 th & 29 th
Tiger Moth sp.	<i>Cymbalophora pudica</i>	Observed on the 27 th & 28 th .
The Vestal	<i>Rhodometra sacraria</i>	Recorded on the 29 th
Beautiful Speckled		One seen on the 25 th
DRAGONFLIES		
Keeled Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>	One on the 28 th
Epaulet Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum chrysostigma</i>	This was seen on the 28 th at the Rio Tozo
Violet Dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>	This was seen on the 28 th at the Rio Tozo
Long Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum trinacria</i>	This rare species was seen on the 28 th & 29 th at the Rio Tozo & Emb.Arrocampo
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	Recorded on the 26 th & 1 st
Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>	Found on the 25 th & 28 th
Lesser Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax parthenope</i>	Seen on the Rio Tamuja, Rio Tozo & Emb.Arrocampo
Scarlet Dragonfly	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>	Recorded on the Rio Tamuja on the 25 th
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombeii</i>	Observed on four days
Iberian Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura graelsii</i>	Found on three days
Willow Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes viridis</i>	Seen on the Rio Tozo on the 28 th
OTHER INSECTS		
Red-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda germanica</i>	Recorded on the 25 th
Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulescens</i>	Seen on three days
Praying Mantis	<i>Mantis religiosa</i>	Recorded on the 27 th
Praying Mantis sp.		A small Mantis sp at Villarreal de San Carlos on the 27 th
Horned Mantis	<i>Empusa pennata</i>	One on the 29 th
Violet Carpenter Bee	<i>Xylocopa violacea</i>	A few seen on two days at FSM
OTHER TAXA		
Scorpion	<i>Buthus occitanus</i>	One on the 30 th at the RA
Red Signal Crayfish	<i>Procambarus clarkia</i>	Common & widespread along and away from waterways
European Tarántula	<i>Lycosa narbonensis</i>	One female with young on the 30 th at the RA
Long-legged Centipede		Resident in one of the guests rooms at FSM

John Muddeman & Ray Nowicki, October 2006

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