

Extremadura in Spring

17 – 24 March 2007

Leader:

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DAILY DIARY

Before reading, please note that the bird list follows the taxonomy and names used by F. Gill and M. Wright. 2006. *Birds of the World: Recommended English Names*. Princeton University Press. This differs significantly in order, but only slightly in common and scientific names used compared to the checklist we used (I've also included most significant changes to avoid confusion).

Saturday 17 March - warm, sunny spring day; transfer to Finca Santa Marta near Trujillo.

A little after midday we all met, almost spot on time, outside the hotel where Trevor and Angela had spent the night. Loading up quickly we were soon on our way W towards Extremadura, and despite plenty of traffic, were barely slowed. A huge traffic jam in the opposite direction however looked no fun at all! Two Black-winged Stilts on a large pool were the first for all for the year, though only Trevor noted a Eurasian Stone-curlew off to one side in some open grassland and a fly-past European Bee-eater was only noted by John and Norman.

A pause at the Bar David was welcome, and the first discussions about bull-fighting arose, given the numerous pictures and 'trophies' adorning the walls. Birds outside included our first Barn Swallows and an incubating White Stork, the first of plenty on the drive. Not far ahead a hovering Black-winged Kite off to one side was the first for all, though stopping on the motorway was out of the question.

The Embalse de Arrocampo was our main stop however, and in the warm and sunny conditions, with only a slight breeze, was terrific. With Corn Buntings, a pair of Southern Grey Shrikes and a small group of hovering Lesser Kestrels en route to the car parking area, things were looking good!

In fact, a Savi's Warbler could be heard reeling from the extensive reedmace beds before we had even all got out of the car, but this was only the beginning, and it was often tricky to know where to look! The Savi's finally perched up in the open for all to see, along with two other flighty birds much closer, Cetti's Warblers hurtled around in territorial chases and plenty of Common Chiffchaffs fly-catched from bushes and vegetation in front. A Willow Warbler also called from a bush beside us. But these were difficult to concentrate on given fly-past Purple and Grey Herons, 5 Great White Egrets loafing on a far bank, several Western Marsh Harriers and Black Kites floating around and occasional appearances of several Purple Swamphens, including a fluffy black chick! A Water Rail squealed from deep cover, a flock of Spanish Sparrows adorned a bramble bush, two Sand Martins passed through, no less than three Little Bitterns were sadly only seen by John, but a brief Common Kingfisher was noted by Norman and another seen very briefly later.

We finally pulled ourselves away, though even the short walk back was livened up by masses of Iberian Bluet damselflies and a few bright Barbary Nut Irises which had opened in the afternoon sun. In fact we were nearly all in the car when a high-pitched "*pseuu*" from nearby bushes signalled a Eurasian Penduline Tit, which then helpfully sat out in full view for a minute or so for us all to see! Singing Crested Larks, a superb male Eurasian Stonechat and Spotless Starlings added to the bonanza.

Fortunately there were few more distractions as we drove the remaining way to our hotel, the delightful Finca Santa Marta, nestling among orchards on a hillside S of Trujillo, and checked-in quickly before an aperitif before dinner...

Sunday 18th March – a warm and sunny spring day; mixed habitats S of FSM.

Norman was up early, hearing a hooting Tawny Owl and later no less than three Common Cuckoos. John later met him by the moth trap at 7:30, but given the chilly, clear night, only about 25 moths were present, and half these were Chamomile Sharks!

Once we'd all assembled we took a walk through the vineyards and orchards for some of the local birds, including Eurasian Hoopoes, Eurasian Stonechats, Spanish Sparrows, fly-over Hawfinch, European Serins, wintering Blackcaps and resident Sardinian Warblers. Calling Short-toed Treecreepers kept well out of sight though, but on our return the White Storks on Henri's roof put on a full display, including mating and bill-clapping for good measure, and Angela's camera started clicking away.

We left late in rather hazy conditions and headed south, passing through Zorita onto open pseudosteppe. We didn't get too far before a fine Woodchat Shrike on a fence turned us around and we were soon admiring this as well as various passing raptors and displaying Calandra Larks in their high song-flights.

The next stop was rather quiet, despite some lovely Western Dappled White butterflies, so we moved on down to the road towards Campo Lugar. A calling European Golden Plover passed over unseen, a Calandra Lark was again heard here though distantly, but 'zitting' Zitting Cisticolas, Corn Buntings and a superb pair of Stone Curlews were great to see. Four Common Cranes flew in, spiralled noisily up and then headed off NE, while 8 more were seen distantly doing the same.

The nearby Embalse de Sierra Brava looked rather empty, but one viewpoint revealed a close Common Sandpiper, plus some distant duck including 5 male and 2 (presumed!) female Garganey amongst Northern Shoveler and Gadwall. Lots of Common Black-headed and plenty of Lesser Black-backed Gulls were present too, though passing White Storks, Griffon Vultures, migrant Black Kites and passing Western Marsh Harriers kept us very occupied!

It was now late, so we headed E to find a quiet lunch spot. As we pulled to a stop shortly ahead again, Trevor's comment that there was a white bird amongst a flock of Common Cranes on the steppe had my pulse racing until we saw that it was clearly... an immature Greater Flamingo!!! What it was doing, walking out head down across the flowering turf, will remain a mystery, though it was presumably the same bird which had been present on a reservoir, with cranes, well to the NE for most of the winter! A Thekla Lark perched on a crag edge, a Great Spotted Cuckoo raced over the *Lygos*-filled fields and more Eurasian Stonechats, Zitting Cisticolas and Corn Buntings kept us occupied, not to mention the continued movement of raptors and storks overhead.

A quiet spot overlooking some dry rice fields was found ahead, though again, just before leaving, a flock of migrating Black Kites and wheeling Griffon Vultures put in a terrific display.

A few rice fields were still wet and had attracted plenty of waders: 2 Kentish Plovers were a superb find, being extremely scarce in the region, but 40 Spotted and 14 Common Redshanks, 2 Ruff, single Dunlin and Curlew Sandpipers, 13 Green Sandpipers, several Common Snipe and no less than 56 Little Ringed Plovers were a terrific supporting cast! Fly-over Water Pipits just refused to land in view, though a fine summer-plumaged bird was found creeping along a roadside drainage ditch which had been cleaned out, which also held Water Rail and a juvenile male Northern Harrier! Squeaky Red Avadavats finally showed, though another Water Rail was also very confiding, being nearly as good as Black-winged Kite and Southern Grey Shrike almost together up ahead!

We finally pulled ourselves away and started back to the hotel, though with one small detour. A small path of rough ground saw us looking at a few Sawfly Orchids in the grass, and while cameras were out, first one, then a second and then even a third Common Tree Frog were all discovered out in full view. Marvellous!

We got back to the finca a little later than expected, but still with plenty of time for "coffee, cakes and call-over" outside, given the just-warm-enough conditions, allowing us to also add three

superb Red-rumped Swallows to our list just as they were called in the list (!), and also note a group of 11 Black and one Red Kite on passage to the N high over the hotel. A fantastic way to round off the day.

Ahh, and Angela had two complaints. Firstly, that she hadn't been kept awake by the Scops Owl, and then later on for having been 'attacked' by a swallow.

Oh, and in fact we finished the day with a meal out in Trujillo, preceded by a quick wander round the Medieval Fair there.

Monday 19th March – Monfragüe National Park.

It started off cold, clear and windy, and though warming rather for most of the day then got even colder and windier by nightfall...

With small birds clearly 'off', we headed north towards Monfragüe, officially declared a National Park just a couple of days before. A 'quick' stop at the Río Almonte turned into a small vigil though, as dozens upon dozens of Griffon and a healthy smattering of Cinereous Vultures started passing through, and continued for over an hour! While this in itself would have been marvellous, 5 or 6 Short-toed Snake Eagles were clearly trying to establish territorial rights in the valley and pairs and singles cruised back and forth, displayed and occasionally called, the whole time! We even witnessed the stunning spectacle of a pair talon-locking and then spiralling down in a free-fall for several seconds before parting again in mid-air. Wow! Three Egyptian Vultures which kept their distance barely got a look-in! A few Red-rumped Swallows and plenty of Eurasian Crag Martins brightened up whatever dull moments there might have been and a tremendous chorus of frogs in the river plus a peeping Common Kingfisher were audible even above the wind.

After a stop for a coffee where we marvelled at the raptor movement we'd just witnessed, we pressed on to the Peña Falcon viewpoint. While I'd planned not to stop, it was a good job we did, "just to take a quick look", since almost immediately Norman picked out a Peregrine Falcon high overhead cruising back and forth in the wind at remarkable speed. Nice, but so what? Well, it suddenly went into a stoop, and despite two attempts only just failed to connect with a passing Common Woodpigeon. It then came back to the cliff only for its mate to appear and almost take a Eurasian Sparrowhawk foolishly crossing the reservoir, before the male again then plunged after, again very narrowly missing, a passing Feral Pigeon. Incredible! But when an adult Bonelli's Eagle then appeared, only to be hassled by the female, the tables were again turned when the male eagle appeared and chased the Peregrine, only to quickly back off when the tiercel Peregrine chased him!!! Fortunately the eagles soon disappeared, the Peregrines went back into the cliff for a rest and our adrenaline finally stopped pumping!

The wing funnelling through the gorge was being well-used by the local birds, though a pair of Black Storks were tucked away deep in a recess in a cliff on a huge nest, and even the local Blue Rock Thrush was much less showy than usual. Nice views were had though, including by some visiting Catalans who even digiscoped the storks using our scopes!

We finally moved on and stopped again along the road when a hooked figure scythed past overhead. Jumping out we enjoyed a couple of close passing Alpine Swifts feeding with numerous Common House Martins in the lee of a cliff, and indeed it was mild and rather less windy here, so we stayed for lunch. A good move, with Angela's first Iberian Magpies, a singing Subalpine Warbler, Blue Rock Thrushes and even a few butterflies, including Large Tortoiseshell, Nettle-tree Butterfly and Green-underside Blue of most note. Three raptors up at one point were another pair of adult Bonelli's Eagles escorting a juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle off their patch!! A lone Black Stork sat on the beginnings of a fresh nest opposite even raised a look of surprise on the face a very small and obviously very bored Spanish boy out with his family when he was held up to the scope, especially when it suddenly flew off.

Villareal de San Carlos was surprisingly busy, but after using the loos we were quickly off and headed almost non-stop to the far N edge of the reserve. Meeting a very good friend Santiago Villa there, we hadn't even got out of the car when an Iberian Chiffchaff started singing in the scrub below us! Though very difficult to see in the wind-blown scrub, most of us eventually got views, though proceedings were severely disrupted when an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle flew

overhead before turning round and going back!!! The main problem was working out which bird it was among the Egyptian, Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, Black Kites and Short-toed Snake Eagle overhead!!! We also sorted out a few more small birds in the woodland here, including the local *irbii* race of Long-tailed Bushtit, Short-toed Treecreeper for one or two, European Robin, Common Chaffinch and Blackcap for a bit of variety.

A hide at the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint meant we were mercifully out of the wind, despite several other people being present, and once again we 'helped out' showing some Spanish visitors perched Egyptian Vultures and our last 'prize', a huge Eurasian Eagle-Owl, sitting on its nest, either just loafing, preening or even tearing at some food present in the nest, but just out of sight. In fact, it was almost certainly feeding tiny chicks, since adults eat their food whole.

The return was faster, with just a short stop at the chillier and now even windier Peña Falcon but the aerial big bird display still continued, including three Egyptian Vultures and also two superb Black Storks which cruised back and forth and back again, high and occasionally low down, seemingly revelling in the near gale force wind funnelling through the gorge. One of the adult Bonelli's Eagles went past distantly again for good measure too.

Coffee, cakes and call-over revealed a wealth of species again and remarkable numbers of them, and the realisation we were already up to 117 species seen by the group (not including several leader-only birds) in just 2 and a half days.

Tuesday 20th March – sunny, cold and windy; Belén plain and FSM.

A cold and frosty start, though all except John got up before breakfast and consequently enjoyed views of perched Hawfinch.

We headed out through Madroñera and then N along tracks. Despite a breeze freshening to cold wind, we were soon seeing birds, including a delightful Little Owl squinting into the sun from a stone wall, various larks including the odd orange-rumped Thekla, and some superb views of Corn Buntings and Southern Grey Shrikes on wires.

A calling Great Spotted Cuckoo fled from some trees and then kept going until lost to sight... Fortunately, more raucous calls not far ahead alerted us to another, which sat high in the top of a small bush, in full sun, and this gave lovely views. We then realised that yet another was on the edge of the same field, though as the telescope homed-in, so they were off, but the binocular views were excellent.

The long and dusty drive out was punctuated by stops in the car, and given the wind and cold (7°C!) air for most of the morning, we were happy for the shelter. More Crested and Thekla Larks, Southern Grey Shrikes, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Stonechats and Corn Buntings formed the bulk of the small birds, with numerous and regular (almost constant!) appearances of Black and especially Red Kites, Griffon and a few Cinereous Vultures and even the odd Lesser Kestrel kept us busy.

Probably the only small field which *hadn't* been grazed to bowling green height by livestock hid two female Little Bustards to great effect, though the scopes once up outside in the lee of the car did give us good views, while a flock of large birds cruising over the pseudosteppees at distance were Great Bustards. 22 in fact! These though appeared to land a long way off the driveable roads and tracks, though we turned onto the Belen Plain to search for them. This turned out to be lucky, with a male Northern Wheatear a nice find as a result, then all the bustards, and more (34 in total!) reappeared in flight and cruised past, giving lovely views, before pitching down into the bottom of a shallow valley well below us. Despite the cold and bad heat haze we watched these at length through the scopes.

We finally moved on when time started moving on, pausing a few times for more birds including Gadwall and Northern Shoveler on a pool with adjacent White Stork colony, a small group of displaying Calandra Larks low over the steppe and another Great Spotted Cuckoo, this one gorging itself on hairy caterpillars in the flower-studded grass.

We headed for a pre-lunch coffee at a bar in Torrecillas de la Tiesa, but a group of Griffons plus one Cinereous Vulture feeding just beside the road on a dead lamb meant another stop, and it was

amazing to watch the Cinereous Vulture aggressively bouncing over the ground, wings arched out, keeping the Griffons at bay. Even getting out at the bar revealed Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, a Short-toed Snake Eagle and a Black Kite going over, though while trying to relocate the short-toed, so a pale phase Booted Eagle drifted gently over at height!

A very late lunch was taken on the edge of the dehesa near a small river. Once the Spanish Terrapins had fallen back into the river in fright, we kept ourselves content with the local Eurasian Stonechats, vultures, Black Kites, and a worryingly non-green, all-brown chiffchaff (but which failed to call) whilst eating. In fact, with a little shelter here, the bright sun had activated a few butterflies, including Spanish Festoon, Western Dappled Whites and a colourful Provence Hairstreak. An amphisbaenian (= worm-lizard) was found under the same rock as a sizeable scorpion (!), but only a large colony of big ants under another.

Returning back to the finca mid-afternoon we walked up the hill to the old orchards above, where thousands of Champagne Orchids were in flower mixed with hundreds of Spanish Milky Orchids. An awesome sight! A couple of Iberian Fritillaries were in beautiful flower too, and a few brooms and Iberian Milk-vetch were also flowering well. With stunning views to the N and SE over orchards, fields and dehesa in the cold clear air, it was a lovely walk.

Wednesday 21st March – sunny, colder and windier; Emb. de Arrocampo and area, Monfragüe raptor feeding station.

It dawned even colder and windier... But, Angela still managed photos of Iberian Magpies and Spotless Starlings before breakfast given the excellent light.

We headed N and back to the Arrocampo reservoir which we'd visited en route down on the Saturday. Visiting a quiet side-arm seemed a good idea instead of the main and even more windswept part. Indeed, we managed to stay reasonably warm in the sun, noting a couple of Common Kingfishers in flight, plus calling Purple Swamphen and Water Rails, but it was tough work to see almost anything. Even passing Sand Martins and Barn Swallows were working hard to feed, but when a lone passing Western Marsh Harrier came through, so it flushed a superb adult Squacco Heron which had been hiding deep in the reedmace beds. This then flew past, giving excellent views before dropping down back along the channel where we later saw it perched - terrific!

We moved on to another pool nearby which was half empty of water, and the dead trees standing proud and the broad sandy edges attracted a few birds. In fact, the first bird noted was a superb adult Eurasian Spoonbill stood quietly on one leg in the shallows, while a few waders, including Common Greenshank, Black-winged Stilts and Little Ringed Plovers scurried around searching for food. A few pipits along the water's edge included at least two Water Pipits, though another Eurasian Spoonbill in full breeding plumage flew in, catching our attention, though was finally shepherded off by the loafer!

Another new bird, in the form of Eurasian Teal, was also noted in a small pool on the opposite side of the road, these hiding quite well amongst the abundant water crowfoot bearing sheets of white flowers. Our parting shot though was as we were turning round to exit, when a normal Spotless Starling landed with its mate on some grass nearby, the mate though being a striking leucistic bird, with off-white plumage apart from some pale brownish feathers in the head and on the shoulders!

After our usual coffee stop we were off for lunch along a little valley, where the banks supporting a small bridge were a good windbreak and formed a terrific sun trap. The bushes by the stream were full of Blackcaps, with a couple of Hawfinches, a few Common Chaffinches and 2-3 Long-tailed Bushtits were seen too. Butterflies were also notably present, with a couple of male Orange-tips, a few Spanish Festoons and Holly Blues and a (Southern) Speckled Wood of most note. The skies overhead were interesting too, with an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle hanging in the wind for a long time at enormous height, 4 Egyptian Vultures over crags and even two high passing Yellow-legged Gulls were seen!

Mid-afternoon was filled at a rather special site, where orchids abounded. Hundreds of Italian (Naked) Man and Spanish Milky Orchids were present, while thorough searching revealed chunky

Sawfly and slender Woodcock Ophrys. The star was a not-quite-out Pink Butterfly Orchid though, only John's second in the region. In fact, since we'd also seen Italian Man and a Green-winged Orchids, plus Sawfly, Woodcock and a few exquisite Mirror Ophrys that morning at a roadside patch, we'd seen 7 species in flower in less than 24 hours. Not bad at all!

We rounded off with a trip to overlook, albeit at distance, the Monfragüe raptor feeding station. While a little slow to get going, apart from c.20 White Storks around the dumped carrion, up to 10 adult Egyptian Vultures, lots of Black and several Red Kites, numerous Griffon Vultures and a few Cinereous Vultures down on the ground or in the trees, were a stunning sight. But when something disturbed them and some 200 Northern Ravens also got up at once, it was an incredible sight! Somehow in the melee, we also noted no less than 3 Bonelli's Eagles going over at height, with two of these returning, with full crops, about 45 minutes later! A wonderful finale to the day.

Thursday 22nd March – sunny, cool, little wind; pseudosteppes between Trujillo and Cáceres.

We awoke to find it cold, but all but dead still. It stayed this way until a light breeze appeared about midday, creating a terrible heat haze over the steppes... But a retrospective complaint by Angela at breakfast was going to be a tough one to solve: the geckos were too noisy in our room to go back to sleep in this morning...

Our first stop was overlooking three fields in front, with *Osyris* scrub off to the right, a little scrub and a few little rocks jutting out in the middle, and short grass to the left. The best birds were not surprisingly mostly in the middle! In fact, just over 60 Little Bustards, including plenty of males with their smart black-and-white neck patterns, fed quite peacefully on the slopes, though the hormones were clearly rising and the odd male occasionally chased after a female on foot with neck ruff flared out behind. While watching these, a Eurasian Stone-curlew crept a few feet in and around scrub, its mate, possibly on the nest, sat dead still a little in front, down at the very base of a tiny sprig.

Black Kites and a calling Southern Grey Shrike adorned tree tops to the left, while a few singing Calandra and various Crested Larks formed a nice chorus. The distant calling Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, only seen as dots flying back and forth over the near horizon were too distant to hear though. Just as we were leaving, so two Great Spotted Cuckoos flew in, the older bird searching out apparently abundant hairy green caterpillars in the grass in fine light and providing Angela with more fine opportunities for photos, while the younger bird provided a fine example of the plumage differences between the two.

Searches for the sandgrouse from the roadside were fruitless, despite finding a fine flock of European Golden Plover, while several stops and systematic scans from a nearby track over the same area were similarly in vain. However, 4 Northern Wheatears were concentrated at one spot, a male Great Bustard flew in, a Green Sandpiper fed just feet from the car until suddenly spooking, a small flock of Northern Shoveler adorned a pool and a male Greater Short-toed Lark rose up in full song flight just in front. Indeed, two more appeared very close in front a short way ahead.

After coffee in Santa Marta de Magasca, we pushed quickly west, stopping to watch off the bridge over the Río Tamuja. Despite the scrub being very quiet, a few raptors passed over including a Short-toed Snake Eagle plus snake, and also a Black Stork, while the antics of mud-collecting Eurasian Crag Martins and a hovering Common Kingfisher were much enjoyed.

The open pseudosteppe ahead, covered in a short carpet of flowers, were simply awesome in extent, though clearly working out where sandgrouse might be was not easy. Stopping in a safe spot for a late lunch was rapidly rewarded with two good flocks of Great Bustards in a nearby field and Angela noticed commotion at a large White Stork colony where, amazingly, a juvenile Golden Eagle had come down and landed on one of the nests! This rapidly took off though and spiralled up to enormous height, complete with stork escort, before drifting off.

As if this weren't enough, a small pool visible to one side held a pair of Gadwall, 17 Northern Lapwings, 5 Common Snipe and single Common Greenshank and Green Sandpiper, while a nearby winter wheat field was being quartered by a female Montagu's Harrier.

And all this without mentioning the constant passage of Cinereous and Griffon Vultures and Black and Red Kites overhead... In fact, a mass of vultures suddenly started homing in on the far end of a nearby field so we headed off in the car towards them. A pale phase Booted Eagle rose up from a field opposite before we'd even arrived, but the vultures were clearly interested in a dead sheep down in a little hollow, even though the cows in the field clearly took a temporary dislike to their presence! Feeding never got going, nor did many of the vultures circling overhead come down, so we took a drive through the steppe to look again for more sandgrouse.

Mid-afternoon sandgrouse are difficult at the best of times, but with very little activity under a crystal clear sky and a terrible heat haze given the cold air, it was basically impossible. However, once we'd found a ploughed field, we stood up on a little promontory to scan as much as we could. Not a thing, despite a small flock of Lesser Kestrels feeding along the road, then a stunning male Montagu's Harrier floating past. OK, so 'not a thing' in Extremadura is slightly different! Suddenly though, we all heard the rushing of wings overhead and astonishingly, 8 Black-bellied Sandgrouse sped over, then finally turned and cruised down to pitch into the turned earth out in the field! Finding them again was difficult, and sadly, being back-lit they were rather poorly seen on the ground, but a great sighting, nonetheless. A chance observation found a Red Kite way up hassling something, and juvenile Bonelli's Eagle spiralling up gave us a clue as to what may have caused the sandgrouse to move.

"Let's get back to the Finca a little early" saw us start the return journey, only to find some of the Great Bustards close to the road, while further along hundreds of vultures suddenly rose up into the air from even closer to the road. Just one dead sheep had attracted all these, though plenty of Griffons and a couple of Cinereous Vultures remained on the ground, despite our proximity.

Noting lots of Great Bustards on the field just behind us though, we turned round and parked in a gate entrance, and two huge 'plain's masters' strode around behind the bulk of the flock, their whiskers blowing clearly in the breeze. A total of at least 81 Great Bustards were in these few fields...! But more was happening overhead too, with a pair of displaying Montagu's Harriers, wheeling vultures and storks, and then another pass by a (the same?) juvenile Golden Eagle, looking all its size in comparison with two White Storks and a Red Kite in attendance!

We eventually pulled ourselves away and headed back via Trujillo, noting a pair of Black-winged Stilts on the Trujillo reservoir, and another pair, two Little Grebes and plenty of Eurasian Coot, around the old Trujillo fishpond.

Shortly after our return, the day's complaint, that the afternoon cakes were too varied to miss was aired. Uff!

Friday 23rd March – almost calm, mild, sunny; over the hills to the E and then down S to the varied habitats S of Zorita.

The cold and wind had kept small bird activity down for most of the week, so we went for a target bird in a nice area and tried to fill a few gaps in the checklist. Our first stop near Madroñera saw us walking out through low scrub, and the local Sardinian Warblers were in full fettle, sitting up on bush-tops, singing their hearts out and giving lovely views. A few Crested Larks, here in Thekla habitat, did the same, atypically. After a bit of waiting we also finally were rewarded with superb views of a smart male Dartford Warbler which flew in singing in response to some pishing.

Pushing on through the hilly dehesa we noted very few roadside birds, despite a Mistle Thrush and a pair of Red-legged Partridge, which almost became a road casualty! The Río Almonte though was gorgeous, and a pair of 2nd-year Blue Rock Thrushes and a couple of Black Redstarts kept us scanning the little buildings on the valley-side slopes. A Common Kingfisher sped past, Eurasian Stonechats brightened up the valley-bottom thyme bushes and Eurasian Crag Martins wheeled over the scrub. Our walk back was punctuated by stops for some very flighty Rock and Cirl Buntings, and though the latter refused to show, the former sat on a small oak and sang its heart out in full view. Lovely!

We finally made it to another stop by the Almonte, this time with a small gorge and cliffs. A fine selection of passerines included local Blue Tits, a visible Winter Wren, Sardinian Warblers, Eurasian Crag Martins and Red-rumped Swallows, with the last being a pair of Grey Wagtails, inexplicably absent until now. A Short-toed Snake Eagle cruising over provided relief from yet more Griffons...

Our goal lay near by, and we eventually got to the tiny hamlet of Cabañas del Castillo not much before lunch! Oh well... Walking up we noted more strikingly plumaged male Black Redstarts, Blue Rock thrushes, the odd Red-rumped Swallow and then the head of a Black Wheatear peering over the crag, but this rapidly disappeared. A few Spanish Festoons and plenty of Western Dappled plus one Large White caught our eye as we continued past the church.

Apart from a stunning view, nothing else was immediately visible as we climbed to the top, but then, while negotiating a small passage between rocks, so a male Black Wheatear sat in full view, just yards away. And even stayed for us all to get into position to watch it. In fact, this was the last 'lifetime' bird possible for Angela and Trevor, and they were delighted.

It finally flew down and we continued on a short way to look back at it for a more relaxed viewpoint, also finding its rather dowdier mate on another rock and another striking male Black Redstart. Only when a few Alpine Swifts sliced past overhead did we really look up, but this was a good change of plan when three Egyptian vultures sailed over shortly afterwards, and then a pair of noisy Red-billed Choughs tumbled over the top of the crag. Even as we were exiting, two dark phase Booted Eagles sped past in the opposite direction! We were down by the car again when we noticed a high Peregrine Falcon wheeling above a pinnacle.

Lunch was taken at a random spot by the road nearby, but to good effect, with Eurasian Jays, Eurasian Nuthatch and a Great Spotted Woodpecker (incredibly, the only woodpecker of the week!) also seen.

We wound our way S though the mountains, noting how remarkably English it looked at one point in hills with deciduous (albeit Pyrenean!) oaks, and finally reached the flat dehesa to the S. A pool near the road held a few Little Grebes, a Green Sandpiper and a Black-winged Stilt of most note, with 'shreeping' Rock Sparrows in a nearby tree sadly only seen as a fly-pasts against the light shortly afterwards. They came down into a field behind somewhere, and while trying to find them watched how a Black Kite came sauntering in from distance, dipped by a tiny pool and snatched, in flight, a Sharp-ribbed Salamander from the water's edge, before carrying it off into the trees. Incredible!

The wet rice fields of a few days before were shockingly, already almost dry, and held very few birds, with the ditches also notably drier, and fewer birds around. A few Red Avadavats, Southern Grey Shrikes and a pair of Black-winged Kites kept the interest ticking along though (Tee, hee! About where else could one say this?!), but some Eurasian Tree Sparrows nearby along the road really gave us the run-around before finally settling in a bush behind and allowing views, even though a chiropractor would have been a handy addition to the party...

Time was once again pushing along, so we dropped in for a brief visit to the Sierra Brava reservoir, noting Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper, Great Crested Grebes and lots of Common Black-headed and a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls, plus some Lesser Kestrels on the roof of an old building. This was quieter than expected, so we opted for one last look along a nearby road towards Campo Lugar. A single male Little Bustard was good, then a female Merlin rushed off, then a male Montagu's Harrier quartered a field while Calandra Larks sang a chorus behind. A fitting finale. Or so we thought, though another brief stop en route to the finca turned up the most fitting climax to a tour to date. There, at last, were some male Great Bustards displaying on the open fields, and for almost an hour we were held with watching a couple of solitary huge males turning themselves into shivering white pom-poms, even though there were two other flocks of large males displaying further away and no less than 66 individuals in total. Since the heat-haze had gradually disappeared during the afternoon, we were treated to terrific, albeit long-distance views of these amazing birds.

Saturday 24th March – sunny, warm, v light breeze after frosty start; FSM and return to airport

The colder than expected overnight temperatures had left a thick ground frost in places including by the moth-trap. About a dozen species were present though, including a Great Prominent and some nice moths in UK terms including single Silver and Pale-shouldered Clouds.

After a normal breakfast we were away as usual, having said our farewells (with great reluctance from all members of the party!) and heading back along the motorway towards Madrid. One last stop was planned, principally for Angela, and despite camera troubles, her "White Storks at the nest" request was fulfilled. The accompanying Lesser Kestrels were fun too, while another solitary breeding-plumaged Eurasian Spoonbill in a nearby pool alongside some Little Egrets was another very interesting find.

We reached the airport at 1 p.m. sharp, and said our farewells, I and Norman going off to Terminal 1 to return the vehicle before going off for a few hours before his late flight home.

I think it was clear that this was an exceptional trip, not just for the number and diversity of birds seen, but also from the point of view of the sightings of most. An attempt to draw out highlights on the last evening ran aground since there were too many, and the beginning of the week seemed so far behind that it was hard to remember! However, for me, it was the sheer quantity of raptors and Great Bustards that will remain in the memory, with views of the displaying bustards on the last evening drawing the trip to a perfect close.

I look forward to seeing you again on a Travelling Naturalist tour, and wish to thank you for helping make this such a relaxing, but extremely rewarding holiday.

Very best wishes, John Muddeman (www.iberianwildlife.com)

SPECIES LISTS

Birds

PHEASANTS, FOWL & ALLIES - Phasianidae

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* 1 + 2 Embalse de Sierra Brava and 2 Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th and 3+ Santa Marta de Magasca and 2 more Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd and 3-4 en route on 23rd.

DUCKS, GEESE, SWANS - Anatidae

Gadwall *Anas strepera* Singles pairs at Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, PC on 19th, Belén plain on 20th and Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd, plus 5+ Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th and 2+ pairs Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Noted widely in small to moderate number daily.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Dozens (100s?) distantly Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th, a pair Belén plain on 20th and c. 10 Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd.

Garganey *Anas querquedula* Five stunning males and two presumed females Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* 3 males and 4 females Cerro Alto on 21st.

GREBES - Podicipedidae

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Two Trujillo pond on 22nd and 5+ Logrosán road on 23rd.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* One Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th and lots Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th and 20+ there on 23rd.

FLAMINGOS - Phoenicopteridae

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* An immature bird on open pseudosteppe with cranes near Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th.

STORKS - Ciconiidae

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* 4-6 various sites in Monfragüe on 19th and singles Río Tamuja and Río Gibranzos on 22nd.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* Abundant, widespread and seen daily in moderate – large number.

IBISES, SPOONBILLS - Threskiornithidae

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Two summer-plumaged adults Cerro Alto on 21st, 9 on passage over Embalse de Sierra Brava on 23rd and another adult in breeding plumage en route on 24th.

HERONS, BITTERNS - Ardeidae

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* A fine adult Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Noted daily in very variable number and at numerous sites.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Noted daily in small number at scattered sites, with maxima of 6+ Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th and Belén plain on 20th.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* 4+ Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th.

Great (White) Egret *Ardea alba* 5 Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Eight Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, a few Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st, 7-8 beside road Madrigalejo rice fields on 23rd and 3 en route on 24th.

CORMORANTS - Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Noted daily and widely in variable number, including 20+ Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, 20+ on 19th and c. 20 on passage high over lower Río Almonte on 23rd.

CARACARAS, FALCONS - Falconidae

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* Widespread and not uncommon, being seen daily throughout the region, mainly in open pseudosteppe and/or on mostly ruined buildings.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Recorded almost daily in small number, but overlooked among the Lessers!

Merlin *Falco columbarius* Single females Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd and Campo Lugar road on 23rd.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* A pair Peña Falcón, Monfragüe on 19th and one high over Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

KITES, HAWKS, EAGLES - Accipitridae

Black-winged (-shouldered) Kite *Elanus caeruleus* One hovering beside road en route on 17th, 1 Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th and a pair there on 23rd.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus* Frequent, widespread and seen daily, with maxima 20+ Belén plain+ on 20th, and plenty on 21st and 22nd.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Common, widespread and seen daily in moderate to large number, including migrant flocks on 18th.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* Two RA and 10 Monfragüe on 19th, 4 Valdecañas and 10 Monfragüe raptor feeding station on 21st, 2 adults Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd and 2 lower Río Almonte and 3 Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* Spectacular numbers, being seen daily from 18th, including 300+ RA and 500+ Monfragüe on 19th, and 100s Santa Marta de Magasca and Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd.

Cinereous (Black) Vulture *Aegypius monachus* Also impressive numbers of this generally rare bird: seen daily in small – moderate number, including maxima 15+ daily 19th – 22nd.

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* Seen daily except on 24th in small – moderate number; max 5-6 RA and 2 Monfragüe on 19th.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* 4+ Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, plenty Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, including a number of adult males, then just 1 female Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st.

Northern (Hen) Harrier *Circus cyaneus* A juvenile male Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* 2-3 males and 1-2 females Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd and a male Campo Lugar road on 23rd.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* A female over FSM early on 18th, 1 Monfragüe on 19th and 1 Valdecañas on 21st; one over T1 Madrid airport was also seen by John and Norman on 24th!

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Widespread in generally small number, but plenty at various sites on 18th, 5+ on 22nd and 10+ on 23rd.

Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti* A juvenile and an adult at different sites Monfragüe on 19th.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Juveniles or young immatures Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, Belén plain on 20th and Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd.

Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* Two adult pairs Monfragüe on 19th, then an adult + a transitional bird near Almaraz and an adult and two transitional birds Monfragüe raptor feeding station on 21st and a juvenile Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* One dark phase Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th, 1 pale phase Torrecillas de la Tiesa on 20th, 1 dark phase Trujillo reservoir and 1 pale phase Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd and 2 dark phase Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

BUSTARDS - Otidae

Great Bustard *Otis tarda* Groups of 34 males + 6 + 1 Belén plain on 20th, 3 males Santa Marta de Magasca and 81 Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd and 66 (inc. 25+ males) Zorita pseudosteppes on 23rd.

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* Two females Belén plain on 20th, 61 + c.50 Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd and 4 Embalse de Sierra Brava and 1 m Campo Lugar road on 23rd.

RAILS, CRAKES, COOTS - Rallidae

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* Heard Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, 2 seen + others heard Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th and 2 heard Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st.

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* 4+ adults + 1 chick Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th and heard there on 21st.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Two Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, lots Madrigalejo rice fields+ on 18th, 2 + heard Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st and plenty at various sites on 23rd.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* Singles Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th and plenty Trujillo pond on 22nd.

CRANES - Gruidae

Common Crane *Grus grus* One in flight over Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, then groups of 4 + 8 + 8 migrating Campo Lugar road and 32 on the ground Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th.

STONE-CURLEWS, THICK-KNEES - Burhinidae

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus* One seen (Trevor) en route on 17th, a pair Campo Lugar road on 18th, another seen en route (Trevor) on 19th and a pair Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd.

STILTS, AVOCETS - Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Two en route on 17th, 4 Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, 6 Cerro Alto on 21st, 2 Trujillo reservoir and 2 Trujillo pond on 22nd and 1 Logrosán road on 23rd.

PLOVERS - Charadriidae

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* 17 Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd and 2 Campo Lugar road on 23rd were apparently migrants.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* One calling Campo Lugar road on 18th, but 31 on the ground Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* 56 in two rice paddies Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, 2 Cerro Alto on 21st, 1 Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd and 23 Madrigalejo rice fields and 2 Embalse de Sierra Brava on 23rd.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Two beauties of this extremely scarce migrant in EX at Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

SANDPIPERS, SNIPES - Scolopacidae

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* Noted in small numbers at wetlands (pools, ricefields) on 5 days.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* A superb flock of 40 Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* A good flock of 14 Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th and 2 there on 23rd.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Two Cerro Alto on 21st and 1 Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Singles noted at a few sites on 19th, 22nd and 23rd, with 15 Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th and 4-5 Cerro Alto on 21st.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* One Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th, 2 Cerro Alto on 21st and 1 Embalse de Sierra Brava on 23rd.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* A single (Norman) Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* A single Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* A ruff and a reeve Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

GULLS, TERNS, SKIMMERS - Laridae

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* Two adult michahellis high over Valdecañas on 21st.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* Plenty Embalse de Sierra Brava and surroundings on 18th and 23rd.

Common Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* Abundant Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th and 23rd and also following ploughing in Madrigalejo rice fields on 23rd.

SANDGROUSE - Pteroclididae

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata* Totals of 29 Santa Marta de Magasca and 3 Llanos de Cáceres, all in flight, on 22nd were disappointingly distant.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* Eight flew very low over our heads Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd.

PIGEONS, DOVES - Columbidae

Common Pigeon (Rock Dove) *Columba livia* Noted widely and daily, nearly all were 'feral pigeons' rather than wild-type 'rock doves'.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* Several en route on 17th, 7-8 Zorita pseudosteppes on 18th, 1 + heard Monfragüe on 19th, several Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd and plenty en route around Madrid on 24th.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Common, widespread and seen daily.

COCKATOOS, PARROTS - Family Psittacidae

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus* Two flew over the Madrid ring road en route on 24th.

CUCKOOS - Cuculidae

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* One seen + 1 heard Embalse de Sierra Brava on 18th, 3 Madroñera, 1 Belén plain and 1 FSM on 20th, 1 Cerro Alto on 21st, 2 FSM and 3 Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd and heard Madrigalejo rice fields on 23rd.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* Incredibly, not one seen, but 5+ calling FSM on 18th, and 1+ calling there also 19th, 20th, 22nd and 23rd, heard en route on 22nd and Madroñera on 23rd.

OWLS - Strigidae

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* A gorgeous bird on the nest in Monfragüe on 19th.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* Heard FSM (Norman) on 18th.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* Two Madroñera on 20th, heard Cerro Alto on 21st, 2 Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd and 2 + 1 + 1 en route on 23rd.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* One was heard (Norman) early on 23rd or 24th.

SWIFTS - Apodidae

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* Two+ Monfragüe on 19th and 5-6 Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* Four Trujillo on 19th and 2 Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd.

KINGFISHERS - Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Two+ Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, heard RA on 19th, 1-2 Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st, 1 Río Tamuja on 22nd and 1-2 lower Río Almonte on 23rd.

BEE-EATERS - Meropidae

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* One from the bus (John & Norman) en route on 17th was sadly the only one.

HOOPOES - Upupidae

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Noted widely in moderate number each full day.

WOODPECKERS - Picidae

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* Just one in dehesa near Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd was a poor show, but a fine bird!

SHRIKES - Laniidae

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* Two Embalse de Arrocampo and 1 en route on 17th, c.8 on 18th, 4 Belén plain on 20th, several en route on 21st, singles Santa Marta de Magasca and en route on 22nd and c. 10 at various sites on 23rd.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* Early migrants; a male Zorita pseudosteppes on 18th, 2 Almaraz on 21st and 1 en route on 23rd.

CROWS, JAYS - Corvidae

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* One Monfragüe on 19th and c. 10 Cabañas del Castillo+ on 23rd.

Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie *Cyanopica cooki* noted in variable, but usually quite large number each full day and on 24th, despite Angela's fear she wouldn't see one...

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Noted daily in moderate – large number.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* A superb pair (perhaps 2 pairs?) over Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* Widespread and locally common, noted daily except on 19th.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* One flew over FSM calling on 23rd (Trevor).

Northern Raven *Corvus corax* Noted each full day in small – moderate number, but 34 over Almaraz and later 200+ Monfragüe raptor feeding station on 21st were impressive totals.

TITS, CHICKADEES - Paridae

Great Tit *Parus major* Noted daily in small – moderate number at various sites.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* One to a few noted daily, especially at FSM, from 18th except on 20th.

PENDULINE TITS - Remizidae

Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* A lovely adult very close at Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th.

SWALLOWS, MARTINS - Hirundinidae

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* Two Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th and 6+ there on 21st.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Common and widespread; seen daily.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* Plenty RA and Monfragüe on 19th, a few Santa Marta de Magasca and 10+ Río Tamuja on 22nd, plus a few lower Río Almonte and Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* Small numbers only noted widely at various sites on 5 days, presumably given the cold and breezy conditions.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Two en route on 17th, 3 FSM on 18th, 3 RA on 19th, 6+ Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd and 3 FSM on 24th.

BUSHTITS - Aegithalidae

Long-tailed Bushtit (Tit) *Aegithalos caudatus* A few Monfragüe on 19th, 2-3 Valdecañas on 21st and heard Río Tamuja on 22nd.

LARKS - Alaudidae

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* Plenty on pseudosteppe areas, including singing birds, but a few good 'winter' flocks still present too; noted on 18th, 20th, 22nd and 23rd.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* The first migrants: a singing male and then two other birds Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd were terrific.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* Abundant and widespread; seen daily.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae* Quite common but easily overlooked; seen on 18th – 20th.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* Heard FSM on 19th, then 1 seen very briefly Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd, but 1 seen and 2 heard FSM 23rd (Norman).

CISTICOLAS & ALLIES - Cisticolidae

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* A few at widely scattered grassy sites on 5 days, including plenty Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

OLD WORLD WARBLERS - Sylviidae

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* Several Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, 2 + 2 heard Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, then heard Monfragüe on 19th and heard Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* Three+ seen singing and calling well Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* Just one Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* Plenty Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, 1 Monfragüe on 19th and a few Belén plain and FSM on 20th.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* One singing well Monfragüe on 19th was a bonus.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* Common and widespread and seen and heard daily.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* A singing male seen and 1-2 others heard near Madroñera on 23rd.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* Singles singing Monfragüe on 19th and FSM on 20th were seen too poorly to count.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* Common and noisy! A pair FSM on 18th, a pair Monfragüe on 19th, heard FSM on 20th and several in full view near Madroñera on 23rd.

WRENS - Troglodytidae

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Heard FSM on 18th, 19th, 21st – 23rd, but only seen upper Río Almonte on 23rd!

NUTHATCHES, WALLCREEPER - Sittidae

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* We finally heard and saw 1 Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

TREECREEPERS - Certhiidae

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* Two heard FSM on 18th, 1 Monfragüe on 19th, heard near Valdecañas on 21st and 1 seen and another heard Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

STARLINGS - Sturnidae

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor* Common, widespread and seen and heard daily; a leucistic bird near Cerro Alto on 21st was a surprise.

THRUSHES - Turdidae

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* Common, widespread and noted daily.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* A common migrant and noted daily, including sub- and plastic- song except on 19th.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* Just 1 en route on 19th and 2 en route on 23rd.

CHATS, OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS - Muscipidae

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* Heard FSM on 18th, several Monfragüe on 19th, a few FSM on 20th and a few at various sites on 23rd.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Two Madrid (Trevor and Angela) on 17th, 1 1st-w male Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, a pair Monfragüe on 19th, a male Madroñera on 20th and 6+ Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Eurasian Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* Common, widespread and noted daily in small – moderate number.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* A m Belén plain on 20th and 3 males + 1 f Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd.

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura* A pair Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* 4 males Monfragüe on 19th and a pair lower Río Almonte and 4+ Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS, SNOWFINCHES - Passeridae

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common, widespread and noted daily.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* Locally quite common, and noted on 5 days, including at FSM.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* We finally saw a flock of c. 20 Madrigalejo rice fields on 23rd.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia* Very poor views of 1 flying over fields Santa Marta de Magasca on 22nd and 2 flying past Logrosán road on 23rd.

WAXBILLS, MUNIAS & ALLIES - Estrildidae

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava* Lots at 2 sites in Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, and c. 20 Madrigalejo rice fields on 23rd.

WAGTAILS, PIPITS - Motacillidae

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Just 1 pair, upper Río Almonte on 23rd.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* Quite common and noted in small number daily except on 19th; max 30+ Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* Lingering wintering birds and/or migrants still quite common, and noted daily in usually moderate number.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* One heard Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, 1 seen and several heard Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th and 2 Cerro Alto on 21st.

FINCHES - Fringillidae

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* Quite common and widespread, and noted each full day in small number.

European Serin *Serinus serinus* Common and widespread, being noted daily.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* 10+ Madrid on 17th (Trevor & Angela), then daily in small number except on 18th.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* Common, widespread and noted daily in variable number.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* Relatively scarce, but noted each full day, maxima of just c. 6 on 19th and 23rd.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Two FSM on 18th, 2 + heard there on 20th, 1 + heard near Valdecañas on 21st and 2 upper Río Almonte and 1+ FSM on 23rd.

BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS & ALLIES - Emberizidae

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* Abundant, widespread and seen daily.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* A pair + 1 lower Río Almonte on 23rd.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* A male poorly seen lower Río Almonte, 2 males excellently watched upper Río Almonte and a pair near FSM on 23rd.

MAMMALS

Western Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* Singles dead on roads on 17th, 18th and 23rd.

Iberian Blind Mole *Talpa occidentalis* Hills in pseudosteppe on 22nd.

Pygmy White-toothed Shrew *Suncus etruscus* One, probably this species (and not a Least Shrew as thought at the time) caught by a Southern Grey Shrike Embalse de Arrocampo on 21st.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* A vixen accepting food at a few feet Monfragüe on 19th.

Egyptian Mongoose *Herpestes ichneumon* One noticed beside the road en route from Monfragüe (Norman) on 19th.

European Wild Cat *Felis sylvestris* One in broad daylight by the Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th was a real surprise.

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* Rootlings in orchards noted FSM on 20th.

Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus* One crossing the road in broad daylight on 21st (Trevor & John).

Iberian Hare *Lepus granatensis* Singles CLR on 18th and Río Tozo on 20th.

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* One Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, 1 en route on 21st, 2 SMM on 22nd and several en route on 24th indicate a slight recovery.

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

Sharp-ribbed Salamander *Pleurodeles waltl* One taken by a Black Kite from a pond along the Logrosán road on 23rd.

Natterjack Toad *Bufo calamita* Only heard in the evening of 17th at FSM.

Common Tree Frog *Hyla arborea* Three superb individuals in the Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th.

Iberian Water (Spanish Pond) Frog *Rana perezi* Heard in variable quantity on 18th, 19th, 20th and 22nd, and two seen in Cattle Egret beaks on 23rd!

Moorish Gecko *Tarentola mauritanica* 2+ FSM on 17th, and variably thereafter, including most evenings at dinner!

Spanish Psammodromus *Psammodromus hispanicus* A single gravid female on the Llanos de Cáceres on 22nd.

Iberian Wall Lizard *Podarcis hispanica* Several on rocks at Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Ocellated Lizard *Lacerta lepida* A single young one on the road near Logrosán on 23rd.

Amphisbaenian (Worm-lizard) *Blanus cinereus* A single in dehesa near the Río Tozo on 20th.

Spanish Terrapin *Mauremys leprosa* 3-4 Belén plain and Río Tozo on 20th, plenty Trujillo reservoir on 22nd and 1 Logrosán road on 23rd.

BUTTERFLIES

(Common) Swallowtail *Papilio machaon* 1 Almaraz on 21st and 3+ various sites on 23rd.

Spanish Festoon *Zerynthia rumina* 1-2 Río Tozo on 20th, 3+ Valdecañas area on 21st and several Cabañas del Castillo+ on 23rd.

Large White *Pieris brassicae* 1 Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Small White *Artogeia rapae* 1 Río Tozo on 20th and 1+ Almaraz on 21st.

Western Dappled White *Euchloe simplonia* Common, widespread and seen daily.

Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines* 2 males Valdecañas area on 21st.

Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea* Several Madrigalejo rice fields on 18th, males at various sites on 21st, and a few on 22nd and 23rd.

Cleopatra *Gonepteryx cleopatra* Single males ESB on 18th and Monfragüe on 19th.

Provence Hairstreak *Tomares ballus* Singles Río Tozo on 20th and Madroñera on 23rd.

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* 2 Valdecañas area on 21st.

Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus* 2 Valdecañas area on 21st and 1 lower Río Almonte on 23rd.

Green-underside Blue *Glaucopsyche alexis* 2 males Monfragüe on 19th.

Nettle-tree Butterfly *Libythea celtis* 6 Monfragüe on 19th, 1 Valdecañas area on 21st and 1 upper Río Almonte on 23rd.

Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros* Singles Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th, Monfragüe on 19th and Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* Singles Valdecañas area on 21st and upper Río Almonte on 23rd.

Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui* A few at various sites on 18th, 20th, 22nd and 23rd.

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilius* Plenty Río Tozo on 20th and several Valdecañas area on 21st.

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria* One Valdecañas area on 21st and another upper Río Almonte on 23rd.

Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera* 2 Monfragüe on 19th and 1 Valdecañas area on 21st.

Moths (all at FSM unless indicated)

Lasiocampid sp. A male of an unknown species on 18th.

Hook-tip sp. *Watsonalla uncinula* 1 on 18th.

Garden Carpet *Xanthorhoe fluctuata* 1 on 18th, 2 on 22nd and 1 on 24th.

Common Carpet *Epirrhoe alternata* Singles on 22nd and 24th.

Geometer sp. *Nebula ibericata* 1 on 17th, 2 on 22nd and 1 on 24th.

Pug sp. *Eupithecia* sp. 1 on 24th as yet unidentified.

Sloe Carpet *Aleucis distinctata* 3 on 24th.

Yellow Belle *Semiaspilates ochrearia* 1 Almaraz on 21st and 1 on 24th.

Geometer sp. *Gnophos mucidaria* 1 on 22nd.

Hummingbird Hawkmoth *Macroglossum stellatarum* 1 Monfragüe on 19th.

Great Prominent *Peridea anceps* 1 on 24th.

Shuttle-shaped Dart *Agrotis puta* 3 on 18th and 16 on 24th.

Radford's Flame Shoulder *Ochropleura leucogaster* 1 on 18th.

Noctuid sp. *Hadena cf sancta* 1 on 18th and 2 on 24th.

Silver Cloud *Egira conspicillaris* 1 on 24th.

Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi* 2 on 18th and 2 on 24th.

Clouded Drab *Orthosia incerta* 1 on 24th.

Chamomile Shark *Cucullia chamomillae* 13 on 18th and 6 on 24th.

Mullein *Cucullia verbasci* 1 on 18th.

Early Grey *Xylocampa areola* 2 on 18th and 1 on 24th.

Angle Shades *Phlogophora meticulosa* 1 on 20th.

Pale-shouldered Cloud *Actinotia hyperici* Singles on 18th and 24th.

Uncertain *Hoplodrina cf alsines* 1 on 24th is a tentative ID.

Silver Y *Autographa gamma* Singles Río Tozo on 20th and Almaraz on 21st.

Noctuid sp. *Metapoceros felicina* 1 FSM on 24th.

Cf White Point *Mythimna cf albipuncta* 1 on 24th.

Rusty-dot Pearl *Udea ferrugalis* 2 on 18th.

DRAGONFLIES & OTHER INSECTS

Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope* Several Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th and 1 probably this species Madrigalejo rice fields on 23rd.

Iberian Bluetail *Ischnura graellsii* Abundant Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th.

Mole Cricket *Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa* Heard FSM night of 18th.

Wood-eating Termite *Reticulitermes lucifugus* Noted in orchard FSM on 20th.

Rhinoceros Beetle *Copris lunaris* A male FSM on 18th.

Fire Bug sp. *Lygaeum* sp. Several Cabañas del Castillo on 23rd.

OTHER TAXA

Common Carp *Cyprinus carpio* Lots sucking in the Embalse de Arrocampo on 17th and 21st.

Scorpion *Buthus occitanus* A super one under a stone Río Tozo on 20th.

Slug Mollusca Some impressively large orange ones under stones near Trujillo on 23rd.

SELECTED PLANTS:

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

<u>Pinaceae:</u>	<i>Pinus pinea</i>	Stone / Umbrella Pine	(3)
<u>Fagaceae:</u>	<i>Quercus rotundifolia</i>	Evergreen Oak	(26)
	<i>Quercus suber</i>	Cork Oak	(27)
<u>Ulmaceae:</u>	<i>Ulmus minor</i>	Elm sp.	(c. 38)
	<i>Celtis australis</i>	Southern Nettle Tree	(39)
<u>Caryophyllaceae:</u>	<i>Silene colorata</i>	pink catchfly sp.	(180)
<u>Ranunculaceae:</u>	<i>Ranunculus</i> sp.	Water Crowfoot sp.	
<u>Fumariaceae:</u>	<i>Fumaria capreolata</i>	Ramping Fumitory	(303)
<u>Resedaceae:</u>	<i>Sesamoides purpurascens</i>	Sesamoides (a small <i>Reseda</i>)	(c. 378)
<u>Crassulaceae:</u>	<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort	(396)
<u>Leguminosae:</u>	<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 angustifolia</i>	Narrow-leaved Lupin (prob. this sp.)	(486)
	<i>Astragalus lusitanicus</i>	'Iberian' Milk-vetch	(504)
<u>Geraniaceae:</u>	<i>Geranium molle</i>	Dove's-foot Crane's-bill	(741)
	<i>Erodium botrys</i>	Storksbill sp.	(758)
<u>Euphorbiaceae:</u>	<i>Mercurialis annua</i>	Annual Mercury	(820)
<u>Thymelaeaceae:</u>	<i>Daphne gnidium</i>	Mediterranean Daphne	(936)
<u>Cistaceae:</u>	<i>Cistus albidus</i>	Grey-leaved Cistus (big pink fls)	(961)
	<i>Cistus salvifolius</i>	Sage-leaved Cistus (small white)	(965)
	<i>Cistus ladanifer</i>	Gum Cistus (big white fls)	(971)
<u>Umbelliferae:</u>	<i>Smyrniolum olusatrum</i>	Alexanders	(1087)
<u>Cactaceae:</u>	<i>Opuntia maxima</i> (= <i>ficus-indica</i>)	Prickly Pear	(1040)

<u>Ericaceae:</u>	<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)
<u>Oleaceae:</u>	<i>Olea europaea</i>	Olive	(1248)
<u>Boraginaceae:</u>	<i>Echium plantagineum</i>	Purple Viper's Bugloss	(1383)
	<i>Anchusa undulata</i>	Undulate Anchusa	(1406)
<u>Labiatae:</u>	<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 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 fistulosus</i>	Hollow-leaved Asphodel	(2087)
	<i>Fritillaria lusitanica</i>	Iberian Fritillary	(2152)
	<i>Hyacinthoides hispanica</i>	Spanish Bluebell	
	<i>Muscari comosum</i>	Tasselled Hyacinth	(2201)
	<i>Narcissus triandrus pallidulus</i>	Angel's Tears	
	<i>Narcissus bulbocodium</i>	Hoop-petticoat Narcissus	(2281)
<u>Iridaceae:</u>	<i>Gymnandris sisyrrinchium</i>	Barbary Nut Iris	(2305)
	<i>Romulea cf ramiflora</i>	Sand Crocus sp.	(2316)
<u>Orchidaceae:</u>	<i>Orchis papilionacea</i>	Pink Butterfly Orchid	(2401)
	<i>Orchis morio</i> ssp. <i>picta</i>	Green-winged Orchid	(2403a)
	<i>Orchis champagneuxii</i>	Champagne Orchid	(2403b)
	<i>Orchis conica</i>	Spanish Milky Orchid	(cf. 2408)
	<i>Orchis italica</i>	Italian Man Orchid	(2409)
	<i>Ophrys speculum</i>	Mirror Orchid	(2422)
	<i>Ophrys scolopax</i>	Woodcock Orchid	(2436)
	<i>Ophrys tenthredinifera</i>	Sawfly Orchid	(2442)

This list has been drawn up 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 & Rodríguez's 'Guía de arboles y arbustos de Extremadura'. Apologies if I've omitted anything obvious.

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