

Picos de Europa

Spain's Green Mountains

6 – 13 June 2007

Trip Report

Leader

Teresa Farino

Daily Diary

Wednesday 6 June

transfer from Asturias airport to Pesaguero

Teresa collected the group from Asturias airport in Avilés without a hitch, and we proceeded to drive along the coast to Unquera, pausing briefly for 'tea' in Riego, before turning inland through the spectacular La Hermida gorge and out into the valley of Liébana. We reached our hotel in Pesaguero in good time to set out the moth trap on Teresa's terrace and have an aperitif before dinner.

Thursday 7 June

Piedrasluengas/Vendejo

The first morning's moth catch was rather sparse, owing to the cold overnight conditions, but we did catch a number of rather interesting species, including two lovely Small Elephant Hawk-moths, one each of Spanish and Lesser Puss Moths, neither of which occurs in the UK – indeed, the former is an Iberian endemic – and two species which are very scarce in the UK these days: Portland Ribbon Wave and Buttoned Snout.

After a breakfast of freshly-baked croissants, we set off in the sunshine for the nearby mountain pass of Piedrasluengas (approx. 1350 metres): a mosaic of alpine pastures and limestone rock outcrops, boasting stunning views of the Picos de Europa to the north. Most of us managed to get pictures of some very confiding male and female Common Wall Lizards here, also encountering a splendid cluster of Malling Toadflax *Chaenorhinum organifolium*, some clumps of the Iberian endemic Violet Mountain Pansy *Viola bubanii*, and a host of Burnt and Green-winged Orchids (*Orchis ustulata* & *O. morio*, respectively).

During the course of the morning, we watched as Eurasian Griffon Vultures cruised down, one after another, to a plateau immediately across the valley, just hidden from sight. Dozens more were circling in the thermals above, along with several Common Ravens and a single Egyptian Vulture. Obviously something was attracting their attention, so we decided to investigate. Although we sneaked up the hill, the vultures weren't fooled for very long, so we had just a few moments' view of a hoard of birds on the ground before the majority took clumsily to the air once more.

We walked over to investigate and found a newly dead calf, which some of us found rather upsetting, but then vultures have to eat something. Unfortunately in this case they went hungry, as the farmer soon appeared with a tractor, removed the dead animal and took it down to the village. This is an all-too-frequent occurrence these days, as current EU legislation forces farmers to dispose of livestock found dead in the field, to the detriment of carrion-eating birds.

We then headed south for a couple of kilometres for a picnic lunch by the Arroyo Lazán, after which we explored the neighbouring damp meadows, finding Early Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza incarnata*, and a host of riverside plants such as Water Avens *Geum rivale*, Globeflower *Trollius europaeus* and the eye-catching Greater Cuckooflower *Cardamine raphanifolia*. While the sunshine lasted, we encountered a range of butterflies – Moroccan/Provence Orange-tip, Clouded Yellow, Duke of Burgundy Fritillary, Camberwell Beauty, Knapweed Fritillary and de Prunner's Ringlet – as well as day-flying moths such as Small Yellow Underwing and Wood Tiger.

However, the rain soon came sweeping in from the south, so we had no choice but to head back northwards to try to find some more sunshine. We ended up by a small chapel near Vendejo, where we had hoped to visit the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe Bat roost of previous years, only to find that it had been re-roofed (almost certainly to the bats' detriment), and the door padlocked. Instead we wandered up a small track and located Sooty Copper and Large Tortoiseshell (the latter taking a liking to Sandy's hat!), in a sheltered glade at the end, before the storm finally caught up with us and put paid to the day's activities once and for all.

Friday 8 June

Cable car from Fuente Dé

As the day dawned fine once again, we set off for the cable car at Fuente Dé, where in a few minutes we were whisked up into the rarefied atmosphere of the Central Massif of the Picos de Europa, at 1800 metres. We left the track almost immediately, hoping to escape the 'madding crowd', and set off across velvety alpine pastures, stuffed with Chamois-cress *Pritzelago alpina*, the Picos endemic anemone *Anemone pavoniana*, Pyrenean Spurge *Euphorbia pyrenaica*, Spring Gentians *Gentiana verna* and Cone Saxifrage *Saxifraga conifera*, the latter found only in the Cordillera Cantábrica.

Soon we arrived at a small pool, teeming with Alpine Newts. By turning over a few stones, we also encountered several Midwife Toads here, while the day-flying moths *Metaxmeste schrankiana* (Pyralidae) and *Eurranthis plummistaria* (Geometridae) flitted over the surrounding rock-gardens. We then walked along a sheep's path towards the imposing wall of Peña Vieja, keeping our eyes peeled for Alpine Accentor and Snow Finch, and although we had good views of two pairs of the former, only Teresa caught sight of the latter, as a couple of birds swooped across the cliff face, high above our heads. We did, however, get fine views of displaying Water Pipits and Northern Wheatears, the latter a particularly pale race here, as well as an abundance of Black Redstarts and Red-billed Choughs, as well as spotting some distant Isard (Pyrenean Chamois).

We lunched on what is these days widely known as 'Wallcreeper Corner', but – unusually – we didn't get so much as a glimpse of these charming birds, even though we could periodically hear the thin, high-pitched whistle of the species in the distance. Some small consolation was taken from the amusing antics of the Alpine Choughs that joined us for lunch, once again providing the photographers with plenty of material.

After lunch we embarked on our 1,000-metre descent to Espinama, first passing through the summer grazing pastures of Áliva, where all manner of livestock – sheep, cattle, goats and horses – was set out before us. Close-up views of a pair of Egyptian Vultures was one of the highlights of the day, as were the enormous spikes of Lizard Orchids *Himantoglossum hircinum* in the Invernales de Igüedre. Once again the afternoon storms caught us en route, however, so we had little time to spare to examine the fabulous display of white Spreading Bellflower *Campanula patula* (usually mauve) or the Fire Salamander efts in the ditch by the side of the road. After our strenuous but rewarding day in the high mountains, we felt that we had certainly earned our refreshments in Espinama.

Saturday 9 June

Puerto de San Glorio/Arroyo de Mostajal

Today we were joined by Bill and Jean Egan, a couple from Australia on a European tour, and elected to drive to the south-west, once again in an attempt to escape the incoming bad weather. Our first stop was at the Roe Deer viewpoint on the road up to the pass of San Glorio, where the tall scrub was

a glorious mosaic of Tree Heath *Erica arborea*, Spanish Heath *E. australis*, St Dabeoc's Heath *Daboecia cantabrica* and the 'sun-rose' *Halimium lasianthum* ssp. *alyssoides*, home to singing Garden Warblers, Whitethroats and Yellowhammers.

A little further on, a quick stop in the usual meadow turned up the diminutive vanilla orchid *Nigritella gabasiana*, as well as Early Purple *Orchis mascula* and Elder-flowered and Heath Spotted Orchids (*Dactylorhiza sambucina* & *D. maculata*, respectively). Also of interest here were Horned Pansy *Viola cornuta*, two species of Lousewort – Whorled *Pedicularis verticillata*, and *P. mixta* – and a few late blooms of Lent Lily *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* ssp. *nobilis*. Butterflies on the wing included Small and Holly Blues, Queen of Spain Fritillary and Grizzled and Red-underwing Skippers, while day-flying moths of interest were Small Argent and Sable and Chimney Sweeper. A fabulously furry Garden Carpet caterpillar and a heaving mass of Lackey larvae were also spotted here, as was a smart Rock Bunting.

We then drove up to the Collado de Llesba, from which we were presented – all too briefly – with a spectacular panorama of the eastern and central massifs of the Picos de Europa, before the cloud swept across to conceal the mountains. Sky Larks and Water Pipits were singing their hearts out overhead, and on the way back to the minibus we stopped to admire an elegant pair of Red-backed Shrikes.

Without further ado we continued on to the Arroyo de Mostajal for lunch, after which we scrambled up a steep meadow in search of Pyrenean Snakesheads *Fritillaria pyrenaica*. Once these had been duly located, along with an extremely obese, metallic-blue Oil Beetle, spotted by Elaine, we aimed for the limestone crags at the back of the meadows, where we encountered some spectacular clumps of the stork's-bill *Erodium glandulosum* and enormous cushions of the saxifrage *Saxifraga canaliculata*. As we circled round back to the car, pausing to watch a pair of Short-toed Eagles and to examine a strange, spurless *Orchis*, the heavens opened once again and cut short our 'naturalising' for the third day in a row.

Sunday 10 June

Old road along the La Hermida gorge/Sierra de Beges

A cloudy start to the day, but undaunted we headed northwards to the start of the La Hermida gorge, and walked for an hour or so along the original route through the mountains here, high above the river Deva. Periodic patches of sunshine brought out quite a few butterflies and moths in the end, including Duke of Burgundy Fritillary, Baton and Long-tailed Blues, Marbled White, Pearly Heath, Lulworth Skipper, Clouded Buff, Hummingbird Hawk-moth and Mother Shipton, and we also encountered some fat Mullein moth caterpillars feeding on the plant from which they get their name (Hoary Mullein *Verbascum pulverulentum*).

As we walked along this old trackway, admiring the views of the eastern massif of the Picos to our left, we disturbed a good number of Western Three-toed Skinks underfoot, although we had no success in catching any to examine their tiny vestigial legs, so fast did they wriggle away through the long grass. Firecrests and Western Bonelli's Warblers sang from the adjacent Western Holm Oaks *Quercus ilex* ssp. *ballota* and Prickly Junipers *Juniperus oxycedrus*, while notable plants along the way included Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*, Ground-pine *Ajuga chamaepitys* and Small Hare's-ear *Bupleurum baldense*, the latter two species protected by law in the UK.

We then drove up towards the remote village of Beges, renowned throughout Europe for its blue cheese – *queso picón* – stopping en route to examine the verges for a wealth of orchids: Pyramidal *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, Woodcock *Ophrys scolopax*, Bee *Ophrys apifera* and Man *Aceras anthropophorum*. We then walked up an old mining track and on to the ridge above the village, where our haul of new orchids for the day more than doubled. Here, among haymeadows studded with limestone rock-gardens, we found Pink Butterfly *Orchis papilionacea*, Fragrant *Gymnadenia conopsea*, Fly *Ophrys insectifera*, Common Tongue *Serapias lingua* and Heart-flowered *Serapias S. cordigera*, but perhaps even more excitement was caused by the almost black pasque flowers *Pulsatilla rubra*, ssp. *hispanica*, which Teresa knows only from this locality.

A chance, but very close, sighting of a Red Squirrel made Emma's day here, followed by one of the highlights of the trip for Teresa: several Chequered Skippers, of the colony she located on the Sierra

de Beges more than a decade ago, and has been monitoring ever since. This is perhaps the only surviving locality for this species in the Cantabrian sector of the Picos de Europa, and one of only about 30 in the whole of Spain.

Today was our best butterfly day of the trip, when we recorded 32 species, 21 of which were new for the week. Among the highlights were Scarce Swallowtail, Spanish Purple and Blue-spot Hairstreaks, Adonis Blue, Glanville, Marsh and Spotted Fritillaries and Large Wall Brown. This was actually a rather low total for this time of year in the Picos de Europa, but given the absolutely dreadful weather from the end of April onwards, we were well satisfied. One last surprise awaited us as we drove back down to La Hermida: a couple of spikes of Lesser Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera bifolia*, clinging to the cliff above the road.

Monday 11 June

Potes market/Mediterranean habitats around Tudes

Due to the poor afternoon weather so far, the previous evening was only the second time during the week that we had been able to set the moth trap, with interesting species therein including Poplar Hawk-moth, as well as Three-humped Prominent and Gem, which occur only as migrants in the UK, plus Ringed Carpet, which is a rarity in Britain.

Having stopped briefly in Potes for the weekly market, mainly to stock up on provisions for lunch (Sandy spotted a Peregrine overhead, but of the Booted Eagles that are usually seen here there was no sign), we headed into the drier, more Mediterranean habitats to the south-east of the Picos. On the road up to Tudes, we spent quite some time looking at butterflies and day-flying moths along the verges, with perhaps the most exciting discovery being a couple of Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moths: a new species for Teresa's Picos list. We didn't quite know where to point our cameras next, being confronted with mating Black-veined Whites (extinct in the UK), Western Dappled Whites, stunning male Cleopatras and a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

As we walked up the road, several Large Psammodromus lizards were spotted sunbathing on the dry banks (with a female posing nicely for the photographers), amid typically Mediterranean shrubs such as Sage-leaved Cistus *Cistus salviifolius*, French Lavender *Lavandula stoechas*, *Helichrysum stoechas* and the white-flowered thyme *Thymus mastichina*. A particularly eye-catching plant here was *Legousia scabra*, a close relative of the bellflowers, with the long heads of Narrow-leaved Clover *Trifolium angustifolium* adding a touch of pink.

Having lunched above Tudes, we decided to walk down to Valmeo, through a dense array of principally evergreen trees and shrubs, including Strawberry-tree *Arbutus unedo*, Mediterranean Buckthorn *Rhamnus alaternus*, Turpentine Tree *Pistacia terebinthus*, and the odd Cork Oak *Quercus suber*. A stop-off at the usual water trough rewarded us with a fine male Marbled Newt, and we spent some time lying in wait for a female Ocellated Lizard that eventually plucked up the courage to emerge from the stone wall where she'd taken refuge at our approach. Many more butterflies graced our route, including Provençal Fritillary and Black-eyed Blue, but the highlight for most was the mating pair of fabulous White-collared Burnet-moths, as well as a six-spotted burnet-moth with very red under-forewings which goes by the name of *Zygaena transalpina*. A couple of Black Kites overhead also enlivened our walk, but unfortunately we failed to locate the Middle Spotted Woodpeckers that we normally see here.

Tuesday 12 June

Vañes/Las Tuercas

Once again we had set the moth trap the previous evening, attracting yet another batch of interesting species, including Goat Moth (very rare in the UK), Poplar Kitten, Dusky Marbled Brown (a migrant to Britain), Orache Moth and Small Ranunculus, as well as non-British moths such as Garlic Mottled and *Hadena andalusica*, the latter new to Teresa's list.

For our last full day in the field we decided to head south onto the Castilian plains. We made an unplanned stop on the shores of the Embalse de Requejada, as Teresa had spotted a Purple Heron on the margins (a species that we haven't ever recorded on this Picos trip previously), before continuing on to the village of Vañes. Here we encountered White Storks in every direction, as well as a vociferous colony of Rock Sparrows nesting in the eaves of the buildings, all to the accompaniment

of the liquid song of Common Nightingales emanating from the scrub alongside the reservoir, and the trilling of Corn Buntings from the surrounding fields.

Just before the village of Villaescusa de las Torres, we stopped again in an area of cereal fields, where Black-veined Whites were ten-a-penny, Pyramidal Orchids lined the tracks between the fields, a Southern Grey Shrike was seen on the telegraph wires, and a Quail was heard ‘whip-whippetting’ amid the barley. The crops were heaving with Field Poppies *Papaver rhoeas*, Cornflowers *Centaurea cyanus* and Corncockle *Agrostemma githago*, and we lamented the fact that these colourful displays seem to have been lost from the herbicide-ridden British countryside forever.

We parked at the entrance to the village, next to a marshy area on the edge of the River Pisuega. This small, rather unprepossessing patch of ground turned out to be a veritable treasure-trove of wetland species, the highlight undoubtedly being the Common Tree Frog spotted by Chris sitting on a bulrush leaf, duly photographed by all those who didn’t mind getting their feet wet! No less than 6 species of dragonflies and damselflies were seen here, in some abundance – Four-spotted Chaser, Red-veined Darter, Beautiful and Western Demoiselles and Large Red and Azure Damselflies – while the calls of a myriad Iberian Water Frogs and the odd Cetti’s Warbler filled the air.

Finally dragging ourselves away, we headed up through the village, the sides of the track edged by a limestone bluff supporting a phenomenal display of flowers and butterflies. A Churchyard Beetle posed obligingly on a shady wall, and some wet sand turned up male Escher’s, Chapman’s and Turquoise Blues, all mud-puddling together. In this area, we also spotted a pair of Rock Thrushes (making up for not seeing them at Piedrasluengas on the first day), as well as a Common Cuckoo.

After lunch, most of us walked up to the highly scenic limestone ‘sculpture city’ on top of the bluff, where we were rewarded with Bug and Sawfly Orchids galore (*Orchis coriophora* & *Ophrys tenthredinifera*, respectively), as well as sheets of St Bernard’s Lily *Anthericum liliago*. The pine plantations en route were worth a quick diversion to locate some huge specimens of the bizarre Yellow Bird’s-nest *Monotropa hypopitys*, and the scrub atop the hill provided views of Subalpine Warbler for Gordon. Among the butterflies which graced our day were a number of species we’d not seen previously, including Meadow Fritillary, Spanish Heath and Osiris and Panoptes Blues.

Having gathered together once more back at the vehicle, we decided that we had time for just one last foray down a nearby track in search of Bee-eaters, and we were rewarded with the sight of half a dozen of these glorious birds hawking for insects along the top of a nearby ridge. Our final observation of interest of the day was on the return trip to the hotel, when we spotted a superb Red Kite soaring over the outskirts of Cervera de Pisuega.

Wednesday 13 June

Playa de San Antolín/Ría de Villaviciosa

Our last moth trap of the week didn’t fail to amuse, turning up such notable species as Least Black Arches, The Passenger, Dewick’s Plusia and Pearly Underwing, but all too soon we had to bid Carmen goodbye and start our journey back to the airport. Lowering cloud when we reached the coast put paid to our planned activity observing dragonflies at San Antolín, with only a few Red-veined Darters braving the cold, damp conditions, so instead we headed up the western edge of the Villaviciosa estuary, where we just had time for a quick scan over the marshes before departing for the airport. In doing so we added half a dozen Little Egrets to our bird haul for the week, as well as Mallard, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Zitting Cisticola.

Thanks to you all for being such a cheerful and enthusiastic group, even when the weather was bad. As most of you know, I lost my notebook (two months’ worth of field data) at Las Tuerces, and have had to compile this report from a combination of our checklist, my photos from the trip, and an increasingly bad memory, so I apologise if my version of events varies somewhat from yours...

SPECIES CHECKLIST

BIRDS - APPENDIX 1: VERTEBRATES

- Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*** : seen only on the Requejada reservoir on the 12th June.
- Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*** : seen only on the transfer from Asturias airport on the 6th.
- Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*** : a first record for this Picos tour, with good views of a single individual on the Requejada reservoir on the 12th.
- Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*** : about half a dozen individuals seen on the Villaviciosa estuary on the 13th June, en route to the airport.
- White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*** : many seen on the 12th on the Castilian plains, including young in the nest.
- Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*** : seen only at the Villaviciosa estuary, on the 13th.
- European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*** : two seen on the 10th June.
- Black Kite *Milvus migrans*** : seen almost every day, but most abundant along the coast during the airport transfers on 6th and 13th, and on the Castilian plains on 12th.
- Red Kite *Milvus milvus*** : one smart bird seen near Cervera de Pisuegra, on the Castilian plains on the 12th.
- Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*** : good numbers encountered most days; one of the commonest raptors in the Picos, but strangely enough, not seen on the Castilian Plains on this occasion. Close to 100 birds had been attracted to a dead calf on the morning of the 7th, at Piedrasluengas.
- Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*** : single birds seen at Piedrasluengas (over the carcass) and Vendejo on the 7th, plus excellent views of a pair whilst walking down from the cable car, near the Refugio de Áliva, and another individual on the Castilian Plains.
- Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*** : only seen once during the week, when we spotted a pair on the 9th, at the Arroyo de Mostajal.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*** : seen only twice, both times from Teresa's terrace, during the evening checklist!
- Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*** : a few individuals seen every day; again one of the commonest raptors in the Picos.
- Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*** : only one sighting during the week, by Sandy, above Potes, on market day.
- Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*** : heard on only one occasion (almost certainly due to the bad weather this spring and summer), on the Castilian Plains on the 12th.
- Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*** : seen in some numbers along the coast on both transfer days.
- Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*** : seen only at the Villaviciosa estuary on the 13th.
- Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia*** : Feral Pigeons seen only on the 6th, 11th and 12th.
- (Common) Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*** : seen almost every day in the Picos in small numbers.
- Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*** : seen only around Potes on the 10th, and on the transfer on the 6th.
- Common (Eurasian) Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*** : heard every day in the Picos, but not seen until we had reasonable views during a fly-by on the Castilian Plains 12th.
- Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*** : unlike most years, when these are heard every night from the hotel, we heard the calls on only one night this year, on the evening of the 12th.
- Common Swift *Apus apus*** : seen in some numbers every, with hundreds observed on the 11th – our sunniest day!
- Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*** : a new species for this trip; a few seen close to Las Tuerces, on the 12th.
- Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*** : heard on the 11th, in the Mediterranean habitats, but unusually not heard or seen at any time in Pesaguero this year, where the apple orchards normally turn up this species regularly.
- Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*** : one seen by Gordon on the 7th, and heard during our last transfer, at Villaviciosa.
- (Eurasian) Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*** : Heard at the Collado de Llesba on the 9th, and again, in some abundance, at las Tuerces on the 12th.
- Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*** : seen every day in some numbers; they breed in the roof of the hotel!
- Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*** : recorded every day and in most habitats, again in good numbers (they breed under Teresa's terrace).

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica* : seen every day, especially in the villages. Curiously, the nests on Teresa's house weren't occupied until July this year.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* : small numbers seen every day, especially in the villages.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* : recorded on the 7th at Piedrasluengas, and on the 9th, 10th and 13th by Gordon, on his early morning forays down to the river in Pesaguero.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* : seen on the 10th, on the Sierra de Beges, and heard on the 12th on the plains.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* : excellent views of the display flight at the top of the cable car on the 8th, and also observed on the 9th at San Glorio.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* : a single bird on the wire on the road to Las Tuerces on the 12th.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* : both male and female birds seen at San Glorio on the 9th, and also on the 10th on the Sierra de Beges, and the 12th en route to the plains.

(White-throated) Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* : seen only by Gordon before breakfast in Pesaguero on the 9th and 10th June.

(Winter) Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* : one of the most vociferous of the Picos passerines, heard almost every day.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* : good views of two pairs at the top of the cable car on the 8th.

(Rufous-tailed) Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* : having missed these birds at Piedrasluengas on the 7th, in favour of the amassing Griffon Vultures, we had very good views of a pair at Las Tuerces on the 12th.

Common (Eurasian) Blackbird *Turdus merula* : seen every day, including transfers.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* : heard almost every day from daybreak onwards in Pesaguero, and also seen on the 11th and the 13th.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* : seen or heard on six days.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* : heard only in the Castilian plains, at Vañes on the 12th.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* : very common in the Picos villages, but also breeding at over 2,000 metres; seen or heard every day, as a pair was nesting in Teresa's barn, and the adults were attracted by the easy pickings provided by the moth trap.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* : one heard in the Mediterranean habitats on the 11th.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* : one seen briefly on the wire above cereal fields near Valoria de Aguilar on the 12th.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* : several males on the Sierra de Beges on the 10th, and a whole family at Vañes, on the plains, on the 12th.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* : both males and females at the top of the cable-car on the 8th, and also on the plains on the 12th.

Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler) *Cisticola juncidis* : heard on the last day, at Villaviciosa.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* : heard only on Castilian plains, on the 12th.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* : heard on the 10th, on the Sierra de Beges.

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* : heard on three days, on the Sierra de Beges on the 10th, in the Mediterranean habitats on the 11th, and at Las Tuerces on the 12th.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* : seen at Las Tuerces on the 12th.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* : seen or heard almost every day in the Picos and on the Castilian plains.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* : heard but not seen on this trip, on the 7th (in the *Genista* scrub at Piedrasluengas) and 9th (a similar habitat near the Collado de Llesba).

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* : heard only at San Glorio on the 9th.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus* : a fairly common bird in the Picos, but on this occasion only seen on the 10th (old road to La Hermida), and also heard on the 11th (Mediterranean habitats) and 12th (Las Tuerces).

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* : although usually a commonplace village bird in the Picos, on this occasion our only record was one seen in Potes on the 11th.

Great Tit *Parus major* : seen or heard almost every day in the Picos, often in family groups (another species – nesting in next door's roof – to take advantage of the moth trap!).

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* : rather surprisingly, seen only on the 7th, 8th, 9th and 11th on this trip.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* : recorded only once, at Tudes on the 11th.

- Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*** : unfortunately we only heard this emblematic high-altitude bird this trip, at the top of the cable car on the 8th, but the thin whistling was unmistakable.
- Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*** : seen and heard every day in the Picos and on the plains; abundant in both localities.
- Black-billed (Common) Magpie *Pica pica*** : curiously absent from the Liébana valley, so seen only in the Beges valley on the 10th (as far south as they come from the coast here), on the plains on the 12th and on the transfer days.
- Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*** : a common bird in the Picos, especially at altitude; seen on the 7th at Piedrasluengas, the 8th at the top of the cable car and on the 10th on the Sierra de Beges.
- Alpine (Yellow-billed) Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*** : only seen at the top of the cable-car, on the 8th, where we managed to get some reasonable photos at close quarters when the birds joined us for lunch!
- Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*** : seen and heard almost every day on the Picos in small numbers.
- Common Raven *Corvus corax*** : seen in ones and twos every day in the Picos, often at close quarters, with a memorable pair mobbing an Egyptian Vulture on the 11th near Tudes.
- Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*** : a female seen briefly by Gordon at las Tuerces on the 12th.
- Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*** : seen only on the transfer from the airport on the 6th.
- Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*** : observed only on the Castilian Plains on this trip, with good numbers at every stop we made during the day.
- Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*** : first heard on the 7th at Piedrasluengas on the 7th, and then seen on the 9th, (San Glorio), 10th (Sierra de Beges) and 12th (Plains).
- Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*** : seen on three days, at fairly close quarters: at Piedrasluengas on the 7th, San Glorio on the 9th, and near Tudes on the 11th.
- Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*** : only heard on this trip, on the 11th in Tudes.
- Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*** : seen and/or heard almost every day.
- European Serin *Serinus serinus*** : extremely abundant in the Picos villages; seen almost every day.
- European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*** : observed only twice, on the 12th, on the plains, and on the last day, at Villaviciosa.
- European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*** : seen almost every day during the trip.
- Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*** : particularly common in more upland habitats, and seen in some numbers at Piedrasluengas on the 7th, at the top of the cable car on the 8th, and at Las Tuerces on the 12th.
- House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*** : abundant in the Picos villages; seen every day around the hotel in Pesaguero.
- Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*** : just recorded the once, with a number of birds calling from the rooftops and eaves at Vañes on the 12th.
- Eurasian Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*** : seen only by the leader, as a pair flew past extremely quickly at the top of the cable car on the 8th.

MAMMALS

- Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*** : bucks barking in Pesaguero most mornings, but we also saw them on the 7th and the 12th.
- Isard [Pyrenean Chamois] *Rupicapra pyrenaica parva*** : seen only at the top of the cable-car on the 8th.
- Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*** : one seen at close quarters in the hazel coppice on the Sierra de Beges on the 10th June.

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES

- Fire Salamander *Salamandra salamandra*** : efts seen on the walk down from the cable car on the 8th.

Marbled Newt *Triturus marmoratus* : one superb male seen in the usual water trough in Tudes on the 11th.

Alpine Newt *Triturus alpestris* : dozens of males and females in the pool at the top of the cable-car on the 8th, plus a few individuals in water troughs on the Sierra de Beges on the 10th June.

Palmate Newt *Triturus helveticus* : in the Beges water trough on the 10th, and at Tudes on the 11th.

Midwife Toad *Alytes obstetricans* : tadpoles seen in most of the Picos water troughs, plus adults by the pond at the top of the cable car on the 8th.

Common Toad *Bufo bufo* : several young individuals seen on the 7th at Piedrasluengas, plus a number of unfortunate road kills.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria* : one on the Sierra de Beges on the 10th.

Iberian Water Frog *Rana perezi* : heard croaking noisily in wet areas on the plains on the 12th.

Common Tree Frog *Hyla arborea* : a first ever for Teresa, who's only previously seen the Stripeless Tree Frog (*Hyla meridionalis*) in Iberia! One lovely, but hard-to-photograph, individual located by the river at Villaescusa de Las Torres on the 12th.

Large Psammodromus *Psammodromus algirus* : lots of females in the Mediterranean habitats on the 11th.

Common Wall Lizard *Podarcis muralis* : superb views of males and females at Piedrasluengas on the 7th, and again on the 9th and 10th.

Ocellated Lizard *Lacerta lepida* : a female spotted on the 11th above Valmeo; we sat and waited for it to emerge from the wall, and some even got photographs!

Western Three-toed Skink *Chalcides striatus* : several seen wriggling through the grass along the old road to La Hermida on the morning of the 10th.

APPENDIX 4: OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Beautiful Demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo meridionalis* : a female seen at Piedrasluengas on the 7th, and both sexes on both 11th and 12th.

Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula depressa* : seen in the marshy area by the Río Pisuerga on the 12th.

Western Demoiselle *Calopteryx xanthostoma* : a male seen in the same habitat/day as the above.

Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella* : again, by the river Pisuerga on the 12th.

Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrosoma nymphula* : several individuals in the same place as the above.

Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii* : males and females observed on the 10th along the old road to La Hermida, females only on the 12th, by the River Pisuerga, and males at the Playa de San Antolín on the 13th.

Field Cricket *Gryllus campestris* : seen and/or heard in the meadows almost every day.

Hornet *Vespa crabro* : seen on the 11th near Tudes.

***Libelloides longicornis* (ascalaphid)** : normally a common sight zooming over the haymeadows in the Picos in early summer, but this year spotted only on the 7th at Piedrasluengas.

Cockchafer *Melolontha melolontha* : recorded in the moth trap, on several occasions

***Trichodes* sp. (Cleridae)** : frequently seen feeding on flowers, especially umbellifers; recorded on the 11th near Naroba.

Churchyard Beetle *Blaps mucronata* : one perched uncharacteristically on a wall in Villaescusa de Las Torres on the 12th.

Oil Beetle *Meloe* sp. : one bluish individual found by Elaine at the Arroyo de Mostajal on the 9th.