

Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Extremadura
10 – 17 March 2007

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Holiday participants

Mick and Dorothy Best

David Nind and Shevaun Mendelsohn

Colin Taylor

Andrew Camps

Margaret Palmer

Norman Sheppard

John and Sarah Barney

David and Steph Bennett

Leaders

Martin Kelsey

Chris Durdin

Extremadura

Norwich

Report by Martin Kelsey, plant list by Chris Durdin.

Illustrations by Rob Hume, except green woodpecker & azure-winged magpie by Szabolcs Kokay from Gerard Gorman's *Woodpeckers of Europe* (Bruce Coleman Books) and reprinted here with their kind permission.

Front cover: Trujillo with white storks.

As with all Honeyguide holidays, £25 of the price of the holiday was put towards a conservation project, in this case for La Sociedad Española de Ornitología (SEO), the Spanish Ornithological Society, and its work in Extremadura. The conservation contribution this year of £25 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, leading to a total of £366. During the holiday Marcelino Cardalliaguet of SEO came to Finca Santa Marta to collect a cheque from this year's holiday in Extremadura.

This year's donation brings the total given to SEO since the first Honeyguide holiday in Spain in 1991 to £15,118. The total conservation contributions from all Honeyguide holidays was at £43,378 at the end of 2006.

Extremadura 10 – 17 March 2007

Itinerary

Saturday 10th March: Arrival in Madrid and travel to Trujillo via A5 motorway, with a stop before Ventas de Retamosa for snacks. Arrived at Finca Santa Marta late afternoon. Tea followed by a walk through the property to the clump of stone pines above the Finca.

Sunday 11th March: Morning visit to Belén Plains with lunch, afternoon coffee stop at Aldeacentenera. Return to Finca Santa Marta across country to Madroñera with stop on heath on hill above the village. Dinner in La Troya, Trujillo.

Monday 12th March: From Trujillo to Torrejón El Rubío, then to Monfragüe National Park. Stop at Castle and then at car park opposite the crags of Peña Falcón. Brief stop at Puente de Cardenal. Lunch at Mirador de Tajadilla, then to the Portilla del Tietár.

Tuesday 13th March: South to Zorita with a visit to part of the Zorita Plains and then towards Madrigalejo. Stop at Sierra Brava reservoir and coffee stop just outside Madrigalejo and then exploring area of Casas del Hito, including visit to Charca del Hito (a large pool), where lunch taken. Then visit to Vegas Altas. Drive to rice fields near Palazuelo with a walk beside Rio Ruercas.

Wednesday 14th March: Free morning in Trujillo, then east towards Villuercas mountains, with lunch on Almonte river near village of Cabañas del Castillo. Visit to village after lunch, with walk along base of cliffs.

Thursday 15th March: Exploring plains around Santa Marta de Magasca, coffee at the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, with lunch on Tamuja river south of the village.

Friday 16th March: Visit to Arrocampo reservoir, between Almaraz and Saucedilla (with coffee stop at latter village). Afternoon walk at Finca Santa Marta.

Saturday 17th March: Early morning departure to Madrid to check-in at airport shortly after 10.15 am for flight back to UK.

Daily Diary

10 March: Madrid to Finca Santa Marta

The party met up at Madrid, with John and Sarah Barney arriving by train earlier in the morning. Most of the group, along with Chris, came in on the easyJet flight from Gatwick, landing just a few minutes late. Once car hire papers had been sorted, there was just enough time for us to get across to the new Terminal 4 to meet with David and Steph Bennett, who had flown in from Manchester. All present and correct, we set off just after 13.00 hrs. It was a lovely sunny day as we made our way around the M40 ring-road, exiting on the A5 motorway for Extremadura. The Gredos mountains formed a spectacular backdrop to the north, with snow on their peaks, but very little on their southern slopes compared to other springs. However good autumn and late winter rains had made the landscape beautifully green.

We stopped for lunch snacks about 50 kms out of Madrid. The lively bar was packed and the atmosphere happy. Our request for ten orange juices initially met with a negative response...there was no juice, until the barman remembered a crate of oranges out at the back. Within minutes he and his colleague were tossing the oranges into the juice press, some missing their target to great amusement! Following lunch, we spent a few minutes outside, looking across a patch of building rubble, on which were sunbathing rabbits, onto the fields beyond. A pair of Black Redstarts were quickly found, as were Crested Lark and a very smart male Serin. Spotless Starling, Goldfinches, Linnets, Swallows, Red-legged Partridge and Common Buzzard were soon added to the list.

As we continued along the motorway we started to see White Storks, as well as a fleeting glimpse by a few of us of a Black-winged Kite, as well as Black Kite and Black-winged Stilt. As we crossed the border into Extremadura, we also saw distant wheeling groups of Griffon Vultures. We headed off the motorway

onto the road that heads south-east from Trujillo and passed through some landscape dominated by huge blocks of granite. We arrived at Finca Santa Marta at 17.15 hrs. Henri, our host welcomed us and introduced us to some of the staff, who helped to get the group settled into their rooms. After tea, we took a wonderful late afternoon walk up through the Finca, through the almond orchard in full blossom, to the stand of stone pines. We heard Short-toed Treecreepers singing and the call of a Green Woodpecker, quite unlike the familiar yaffle call in Britain. There were also Song Thrushes and Blackcaps, and a fine Black Vulture loomed across our field of view, as did a couple of Ravens. We found Sage-leaved Cistus in flower as well as Amethyst Toadflax, among others. On our return to the finca, Henri welcomed us with cocktails followed by dinner.

11 March: Belén Plains and Madroñera

A fine clear and calm morning for what proved to be a warm spring day with just a light fresh breeze. A pre-breakfast walk produced Hawfinches for some, Green Woodpecker as well as the almost ubiquitous Hoopoes.

We spent most of the day slowly exploring the open plains north-east of the small village of Belén. At our first stop just outside the village, affording us a superb panorama of the habitat, a party of five Short-toed Eagles drifted slowly over, clearly on migration, with a Red Kite. Shortly afterwards we stopped again in a gateway and took in the sight of hundreds of Hoop Petticoat Narcissus in bloom. We saw our first Calandra Larks of the day, as well as wintering parties of Skylark and Meadow Pipit; Corn Buntings sang from roadside fences. At subsequent stops we watched more and more Calandra Larks starting to sing, circling at great height with their highly mimetic song, and then descending with their characteristic slow-motion heavy flapping. On higher ground, we stopped for a good scan and David remarked on three birds sitting on the ground nearby: they were Great Bustards! They sat, seemingly unperturbed, the whole time. Behind them, momentarily appeared two or three others over a ridge. On distant thermals a group of about 70 Griffon Vultures rose, while we saw another Short-toed Eagle and a faraway single Common Crane. A distant Lesser Kestrel hunted close to the road.

We stopped for lunch to view a multi-layered White Storks colony on some dead trees, next to a pool which hosted Shoveler, Mallard, Teal, Gadwall and a Moorhen. A Spanish Festoon butterfly provided close views for us all, along with a Clouded Yellow. Close to a small group of Griffon and Black Vultures, Colin spotted another raptor rising with them and it was quickly joined by another: Golden Eagles, a fine juvenile and an individual almost in full adult plumage. We all had an excellent opportunity to study them at length. We continued after lunch, stopping to watch a mixed flock of Spanish and House Sparrows and a much better view of Little Owl than the distant ones we had seen on stone walls earlier. A roadside pool had three Stripe-necked Terrapins, as well as a Green Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover.



After a stop at Bar Martín in Aldeacentenera, where we admired the seven White Storks' nests on the church tower, some rather precariously placed, we drove through the undulating dehesa to Madroñera. We reached a patch of broom and lavender heath. Here the density of the Hoop Petticoat Narcissus was even greater than that of the plains. We got excellent views of a male Dartford Warblers, perched in good light at the top of a bush, its deep pink underparts showing excellently. A singing Sardinian Warbler also was obliging and we got several, rather distant views of Thekla Lark, including one performing a song flight above us.

Back at Finca Santa Marta, we went through the checklists before heading for Trujillo for dinner at La Troya restaurant. Situated on the fine medieval town square, the restaurant provided an excellent series of local dishes.

12 March: Monfragüe National Park

Another fine day. Pre-breakfast walks yielded Great Spotted Cuckoo and Hawfinch again for some. As we left after breakfast, some of the party had brief views of Rock Sparrow on wires over the vineyard opposite the entrance of the Finca. We headed north from Trujillo to Monfragüe National Park (designated as such only a few weeks earlier). The route took us first through the rocky granite terrain around Trujillo, and then through dehesa as far as the eye could see, with the only changes being when we dropped down to cross three river valleys: the Tozo, the Almonte and finally the narrow Arroyo de la Vid.

After the last crossing we followed the road winding up to the edge of the Monfragüe Park, heralded by a rocky ridge, capped by a small castle and a spectacular gorge through which passed the Tajo river. Our first stop was the castle itself which we reached by climbing up stone steps through groves of wild olive and cork oak. The view from the top was stunning: a vast dehesa panorama to the south, while to the north the hills of the park, the man-made lakes along the river valley and behind the snow-capped Gredos. We were very pleased to have close views of a Red-billed Chough around the castle, Blue Rock Thrush, as well as fly-bys of many Griffon Vultures, a pair of Egyptian Vultures and Black Vultures.



Hawfinches flew across the road as we drove to our next port of call, the famous Peña Falcón and Salto de Gitano (the Gypsy's leap). Here close to the base of the gorge, we enjoyed more spectacular views of Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, a Sparrowhawk as well as four Black Storks. Smaller birds were not outdone: a delightfully tame Rock Bunting, Crag Martins and a superb Blue Rock Thrush, as well as a singing Black Redstart. By the car park, on the tips of twigs of a bare nettle-tree we found a fine Nettle-tree Butterfly, the first of several that we saw during the day, and a recently emerged Large Tortoiseshell. We also found a clump of Spanish Bluebells.

We stopped briefly opposite the Cardenal bridge just as three Alpine Swifts flew over. Hundreds of House Martins were flying around the road bridge. After a stop at Villareal de San Carlos, we found a Short-toed Eagle perched on a pylon close-by. We continued through to Tajadilla, a lovely picnic spot just downstream from one of the dams along the course of the river. It overlooked another rock face with nesting Griffon Vultures, with Black Kites and Egyptian Vulture present as well. A Hawfinch was briefly seen, attracted by the elms in seed. A pair of Golden Eagles passed high overhead. A journalist from the Spanish national newspaper *El País* joined us here, gathering information on the Honeyguide group as an example of wildlife tourism linked to the recently announced National Park status for Monfragüe.

Another Short-toed Eagle was seen on a post as we headed after lunch to the Portilla del Tietár. At the Portilla, the viewpoint directed our gaze onto the wonderful strata of the cliffs opposite, supporting another colony of Griffon Vultures. We found one of the pair of resident Eagle Owls, sitting on her nest on the cliff opposite under an *Adenocarpus* bush. Over the course of our stay there, everyone got, eventually, sufficiently good views to convince themselves that the sitting bird was indeed animate! Lucky ones saw her deep orange eye, or saw her move a little. The barking call of Spanish Imperial Eagle draw our attention to the arrival of one of the local pair, which perched on the skyline of the cliffs opposite, preening initially and then gazing majestically across its domain. Just at the same time, a Golden Eagle was soaring distantly to the right.

Angel Tears and Hoop Petticoat Narcissus grew side-by-side on the bank beside the road.

13 March: Rice fields and plains near Madrigalejo

A pre-breakfast walk yielded a drumming Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*above*) for Colin and Andrew, as well as more Hawfinches.

With another fine day ahead, we drove south after breakfast. A stop at a filling station at Zorita produced Lesser Kestrel and Crag Martin and we then drove across the Zorita Plains towards Madrigalejo. Next to the turning for Campo Lugar, a flock of at least 100 Little Bustards were present. This encouraged us to make a detour along that road to see if we could locate the flock from the quieter minor road. Only a few of the birds were visible, but they nevertheless provided good views. As we watched them, seven Great Bustards flew over the main road, landing in a rather rocky field. Calandra Larks started to climb, one after the other until small groups of singing males seemed to fill the skies. A group of Lesser Kestrels also appeared, hunting over the plains. We continued a little further, finding a further group of Great Bustards (including some fine males) on one side of the road and a group of Little Bustards on the other!

After coffee just outside Madrigalejo, we then entered an area of mixed habitat, leading to rice fields, known as Casas del Hito. Several Southern Grey Shrikes were seen, Zitting Cisticolas (Fan-tailed warblers) provided excellent views, as well as flocks of Spanish Sparrows. Approaching a patch of

woodland, we glimpsed a Black-shouldered Kite flying from a tree in front of us. A second bird was soon located and we were treated to superb views of these beautiful small raptors, gliding past with wings held in a steep V as well as hovering. We then drove up to a pool (Charca el Hito) sited behind embankments and climbed up to peer over the edge. A few Mallards were present and, very distantly at the back of the pool, about a dozen Garganeys and some Pintails. We ate our lunch on the embankment, which provided an excellent view of the extensive rice stubble. A flock of Black-tailed Godwits flew over, just as two Black-bellied Sandgrouse flew in the opposite direction. Seconds later three Avocets flew in. A very distant flock of over 20 Common Cranes were found: our only sighting of the day. Cetti's Warblers and Zitting Cisticolas sang, while Water Rails called from the ditch below. From the ditch, Shevaun saw a spotted bird emerge, a few minutes later it briefly reappeared: a Spotted Crake, but unfortunately only three of the group saw it. Returning to the main road, we stopped to watch a group of Red Avadavats.

We then travelled onto another rice field area, south of Madrigalejo, around the village of Vegas Altas. Many of us had good views of a Water Pipit feeding at the edge of one field and the area seemed to hold a lot of Common Snipe. As we left the area, having found no cranes, we saw seven male Great Bustards, beautiful in the early afternoon sun, with Iberian Hare running in the same field.

We then headed to a third irrigated zone, near the village of Palazuelo. We stopped beside the River Ruercas to check out a good area of riverine habitat. We saw another flock of Red Avadavats, as well as Kingfisher, but the highlight was a group of five Large Psammmodromus lizards, basking in the afternoon sun. Before dinner, adventurous members of the group hiked the path up the hill over the wall beyond the stone pines to where Sarah had found orchids the previous day. Both Champagne and Milky Orchids were in flower.

14 March: Trujillo and Cabañas del Castillo

More of the group saw the female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker drumming in the vineyard at the entrance of the Finca before breakfast. With another warm and cloudless day forecast we headed off to spend the morning visiting Trujillo. The beautiful medieval town square and the narrow cobbled streets leading up to the castle are dominated by the old granite-built palaces and large churches built, testimony to the wealth brought back from South America by the conquistadores born in Trujillo. The same buildings with their old tiled roofs support one of Spain's most important colonies of Lesser Kestrel as well as many pairs of Pallid Swift. We enjoyed watching both species, both in the main square, as well as from the castle, where we had excellent views of Lesser Kestrels from above. Near the castle we watched basking Spanish Wall Lizards and Large Psammmodromus, while a Violet Carpenter bee and Hummingbird Hawk Moth were also present.

At 12.30, after coffee in the Plaza Mayor, we left Trujillo and headed ten kilometres up the motorway, then taking a road to Torrecillas and thence to Aldeacentenera. We continued to the Villuercas mountains, a lovely series of ridges to the east of the dehesa and plains that we had been exploring over the last few days. We stopped for lunch at a crossing of the Rio Almonte, where the river passes through a narrow gorge. As well as Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, we had superb views of a two-year old Golden Eagle: our sixth of this species in four days! A Grey Wagtail frequented the fast-flowing river's boulders, a Rock Bunting perched on a riverside tree, while House Martins flew up to their nests under an overhang in the cliff above.



Nearby is the tiny village of Cabañas del Castillo, perched at the base of one of a pair of crags, on the top of which sits an ancient castle. We walked through the village and then along a path leading to the small village cemetery and a gap between the crags, to afford a magnificent view of the valley to the east. Quickly we found first one and then another Black Wheatear, superb views of this lovely bird. The rocks above the village also held Black Redstarts and Blue Rock Thrushes. From the vantage point overlooking the valley behind the village, we could watch passing Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, a few Alpine Swifts, Crag Martins and two Short-toed Eagles. Botanically the area was productive with Dwarf Sheep's Bit, Hoop Petticoat Narcissus and a fine yellow toadflax.

15 March: Santa Marta de Magasca

The settled warm and sunny weather continued. After breakfast, we drove west of Trujillo, seeing two Little Bustards from the main road and then we took the road to Santa Marta de Magasca. Stopping at the edge of the plains, we heard some distant Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and then saw a flock of about 40 birds flying along a ridge at the top of field, before then descending out of view on the other side of the ridge. Dorothy, who had been carefully scanning a field, found two Stone-curlews and everyone was able to get good views of them. A party of Little Bustards were then found in the adjoining field, and then a Great Spotted Cuckoo, searching the ground for caterpillars. Continuing along the road, we stopped at the brow of the hill and were rewarded by views of the Pin-tailed Sandgrouse on the ground. A little farther on we were able to walk along a wide track, enjoying the wonderfully mimetic song of Calandra Lark. Black and Griffon Vultures passed overhead. Dozens of Barbary Nut Iris were poised to open into flower.

After coffee in the village of Santa Marta de Magasca we headed south to the Rio Tamuja, set in a deep wooded valley. Here we had lunch in this wonderful spot. A procession of raptors passed overhead. We saw no fewer than eight species there: Bonelli's Eagle (*right*), Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Black and Griffon Vulture, Black and Red Kite and Common Buzzard. Several Cleopatra butterflies were on the wing, as were Swallowtail, Brown Argus and Clouded Yellow. We ate lunch to the background chorus of dozens of Iberian Water Frogs. A clump of Common Jonquil was also found. We then drove towards the Cáceres road. Corn Buntings were becoming more and more common and we saw an impressive flock of over 100 Ravens. Taking a small country lane for a few hundred metres, we stopped at a pool which hosted a Greenshank, two Green Sandpipers, two Snipe and a Little Grebe. While we were watching these, Dorothy's careful scanning in the opposite direction produced a flock of about 40 Great Bustards. Careful scrutiny of the flock produced sightings of four Little Bustards and it was good to see both bustard species side-by-side. Several Barbary Nut Irises were in flower.



Returning to Finca Santa Marta late afternoon, we met Sarah who had had a wonderful day exploring the hill above the finca. Later that evening, Marcelino Cardalliaquet (Extremadura representative of the Spanish Ornithological Society) gave an illustrated talk on bird conservation in Extremadura and received a cheque from Chris as a contribution from the group to continue SEO's work.

16 March: Arrocampo and Jaraicejo

An overflying Hobby put in an appearance for a lucky few just before breakfast. After breakfast we headed up to motorway to Almaraz and the reservoir of Arrocampo, with Colin counting Black Kites all the way! The reservoir lies between the town of Almaraz and the village of Saucedilla and provides cooling water for the power station. The water circulating around is slightly warmer than the average, probably accounting for the luxuriant growth of littoral vegetation. We parked beyond a bridge and scanned the vegetation on both sides. Quickly we found our first Purple Swamphen, and soon were watching others clambering through the vegetation. A Purple Heron was spotted flying into the reeds, closely followed by a Grey Heron. A Savi's Warbler reeled in the distance and eventually we tracked it down: a rather plain warbler perched high on a clump of vegetation. A brief snatch of Sedge Warbler song was also heard. A fine male Marsh Harrier quartered the reeds and rushes, later seen with a female, with another male behind. A small group of Common Waxbills frequented a patch of brambles. We then went to another viewpoint, having good views of Spanish Sparrows feeding and seeing two Great White Egrets in the distance.

A coffee stop in the village of Saucedilla beckoned and we found a bar close to the old church. The latter has a colony of Lesser Kestrels and we had magnificent views of birds wheeling overhead and a fine male perched beside its nest hole. We then found an excellent lunch stop beside the pool at Cerro Alto, where the lowered water level had exposed mud. Small numbers of waders such as Black-winged Stilts and Ruff were present, but pride of place were a pair of Spoonbills which flew in to feed energetically amongst the waders. They were in superb plumage. Eventually they lifted off, circled and departed, a signal perhaps for us to start our return to the Finca.

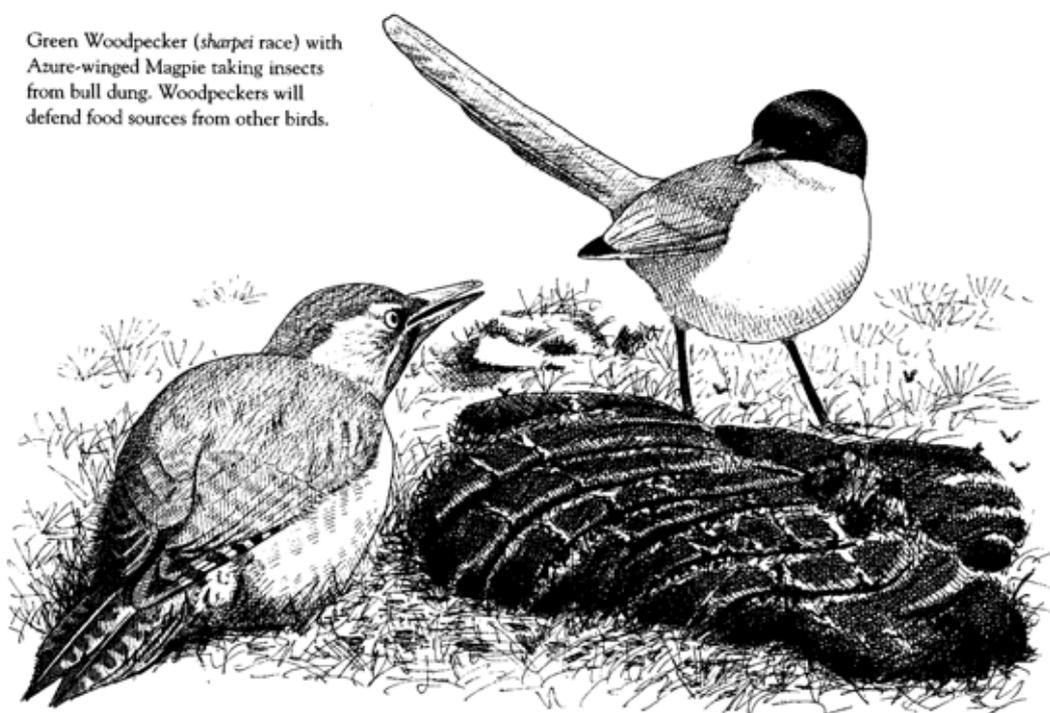
Just after leaving Almarez, we stopped to admire a stand of Naked Man Orchids and then returned by the motorway to Trujillo, with a grey shower cloud hanging over our destination: the first we had seen for the whole week.

Back at the Finca we had our final afternoon tea and checklist call-over, followed by a group photo as a few drops of rain fell. The shower was soon over and most of the party took the opportunity to walk up the track to the top of the property and beyond to see the orchids and Iberian Fritillaries. It was a beautiful evening walk, with good views of Hawfinch being an extra bonus.

17 March: Finca Santa Marta to Madrid

As we set off just before dawn for the airport, the clear sky heralded yet again another sunny, clear day in store. We had indeed been lucky with the weather throughout the holiday. Swallows and wrens joined the dawn chorus and as we drove along the motorway, the first birds seen were the early-rising Black Kites, languidly flapping alongside the road. Apart from a short delay at the entrance of Madrid caused by a police roadblock, we had an easy run to the airport, arriving in good time for the check-in and farewells.

Green Woodpecker (*sharpei* race) with Azure-winged Magpie taking insects from bull dung. Woodpeckers will defend food sources from other birds.



Highlights of the week, as nominated by group members

David B: being on the same level as griffon vultures and hearing the wind through their feathers.

Steph: lunch by the river Tamuja.

David N: Iberian fritillary; rock bunting eating crumbs; lesser kestrels on the church at Saucedilla.

Shevaun: Finca Santa Marta and the setting; white storks; being surrounded by school children using her binoculars in Trujillo.

Dorothy: bustards, both great and little, especially when flying.

Mick: so many bustards.

Colin: "died and been to heaven for a week"!

Margaret: Spanish imperial eagle; red-rumped swallows; all those azure-winged magpies.

Norman: short-toed eagles over Belén plain; the ambience of Finca Santa Marta.

Sarah: black-shouldered kite; Sardinian and Dartford warblers; walking through so many flowers; great views through telescopes; the high-flying party of cranes.

Andrew: black-shouldered kite and bustards; brilliant starry skies.

Martin: party of five short-toed eagles over Belén plain.

Chris: black-shouldered kites; Iberian fritillary and Sarah's orchid fields; Provence hairstreak.

And the almond trees in blossom – everyone!

Systematic lists – Birds

A summary of sightings contributed by the whole group at the daily “call-over”

Little Grebe	One on a pool near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March and one near Trujillo on 16 th March.
Great Crested Grebe	Pairs on Sierra Brava reservoir and Charca del Hito on 13 th March and at Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Cormorant	Seen almost daily along rivers and on water bodies, over 100 flying over the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca northwards in a long line on 15 th March.
Cattle Egret	Seen daily.
Little Egret	Small numbers seen most days around large pools. A flock of 20 on the ricefields at Vegas Altas on 13 th March
Great White Egret	One present on roadside pool near Madrigalejo on 13 th March and two at Arrocampo on 16 th March. This species is now being recorded more frequently in Extremadura.
Grey Heron	Seen in small numbers almost every day.
Purple Heron	Four seen at Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Black Stork	At least six in Monfragüe on 12 th March.
White Stork	Common throughout the week, around towns and villages, as well as in the fields.
Spoonbill	Excellent views of two feeding at the pool of Cerro Alto, near Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Gadwall	Two on pool in Belén Plains on 11 th March.
Mallard	Pairs seen almost daily on roadside pools with small numbers present at Belén Plains, Sierra Brava and Casas del Hito.
Pintail	Three at Charca del Hito on 13 th March.
Garganey	Ten, seen distantly, at Charca del Hito on 13 th March.
Shoveler	Four present on pool on Belén Plains on 11 th March.
Black-shouldered Kite	One hunting beside motorway on 10 th March and a pair at Casas del Hito on 13 th March.
Black Kite	Double figures seen everyday.
Red Kite	Single figures seen everyday, especially over dehesa and the plains.
Egyptian Vulture	Seen, generally in pairs, at Monfragüe and the Villuercas mountains, with one birds also seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March.
Griffon Vulture	Good numbers seen everyday, especially at Monfragüe on 12 th March when at least 200 seen, and over 100 on Belén Plains the previous day. The views from the castle there were especially memorable.

Black Vulture	Seen most days, often totalling double figures, especially on Belén Plains and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
Short-toed Eagle	Seen almost daily, often in pairs, with some superb close views obtained on occasions. A party of five together, almost certainly on migration, over Belén Plains on 11 th March.
Marsh Harrier	Recorded on Belén Plains (single bird) with six on the ricefields on 13 th March and a similar number at Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Hen Harrier	A male seen near Aldeacentenera on 11 th and 14 th March, and another male near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March.
Sparrowhawk	Four different individuals seen at Monfragüe on 12 th March.
Common Buzzard	Seen daily.
Spanish Imperial Eagle	One bird perched on the top of the cliff at Portilla del Tiétar in Monfragüe on 12 th March.
Golden Eagle	A very good week for this species: two birds together over Belén Plains on 11 th March, two birds at Mirador de Tajadilla and a third at Portilla del Tiétar in Monfragüe on 12 th March and the sixth sighting, a two-year old bird over the Rio Almonte near Cabañas del Castillo on 14 th March.
Bonelli's Eagle	One bird over the Rio Tamuja on 15 th March.
Booted Eagle	One bird (pale phase) passing high overhead at Rio Tamuja on 15 th March.
Lesser Kestrel	Seen daily in double figures. Excellent views obtained in Trujillo and Saucedilla of this exquisite little falcon.
Common Kestrel	Seen almost daily in single figures.
Hobby	One bird overhead with swallows early morning on 16 th March at Finca Santa Marta.
Red-legged Partridge	Seen most days, especially common around Santa Marta de Magasca.
Quail	One heard on ricefields on 13 th March.
Water Rail	Heard at Charca del Hito on 13 th March and Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Spotted Crake	One seen briefly but well by a few members of the party at Charca del Hito on 13 th March.
Moorhen	Small numbers on ricefields and Arrocampo.
Purple Swamphen	Excellent views of at least ten birds at Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Coot	Present at the reservoirs of Sierra Brava and Arrocampo.
Common Crane	One birds flying high over Belén Plains on 11 th March and 24 circling at distance over Casas del Hito on 13 th March.
Little Bustard	Winter flocks totalling 130 present on Zorita Plains on 13 th March, and 30 in small groups near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March.

Great Bustard	Five or six birds on Belén Plains on 11 th March, a total of over 30 birds seen on 13 th March (seven near Sierra Brava, over 16 on Zorita Plains and seven at Vegas Altas) and over 50 west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March.
Stone-curlew	Two birds seen well east of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March.
Black-winged Stilt	Two seen from motorway on 10 th March and about four at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Avocet	Three at Charca del Hito on 13 th March.
Ringed Plover	One with the following species at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Little Ringed Plover	One beside pool on Belén Plains on 11 th March and two at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Golden Plover	Three on plains east of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March were the only records.
Lapwing	Very few of this winter visitor still present: two on Belén Plains on 11 th March, 12 west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March and 4 at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Little Stint	Two seen distantly at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Ruff	About six at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Snipe	At least 50 seen during the day in the rice fields on 13 th March, two on pool west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March and at least three at Arrocampo and Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Black-tailed Godwit	Over 100 flying over Charca del Hito on 13 th March.
Redshank	Two at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Greenshank	One on a pool on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March and at least four at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Green Sandpiper	One on Belén Plains on 11 th March, two west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March and about four at Cerro Alto on 16 th March. One bird also seen near Trujillo.
Common Sandpiper	Two at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Black-headed Gull	Small flocks seen almost daily.
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Small numbers seen from motorway, on pool near Trujillo and over ricefields.
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	Two in flight over Charca del Hito on 13 th March.
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	Over 40 seen in flight and several of the flock seen well on the ground on plains east of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March.
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	Seen daily
Woodpigeon	Small numbers seen almost daily.
Collared Dove	Seen daily.

Great Spotted Cuckoo	One on Belén Plains on 11 th March, one at Finca Santa Marta and one seen while driving to Monfragüe on 12 th March, one east of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March and one at Cerro Alto on 16 th March.
Scops Owl	Heard in the evening at the Finca from 15 th March.
Eagle Owl	Incubating bird at Monfragüe on 12 th March.
Little Owl	Five seen at Belén Plains on 11 th March, one west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March and heard at the Finca on 16 th March.
Pallid Swift	Excellent views at Trujillo on 14 th March. Distant swifts seen during the week elsewhere were probably of this species.
Alpine Swift	Three seen at Monfragüe on 12 th March and four or five at Cabañas del Castillo on 14 th March.
Kingfisher	One seen on Rio Ruercas on 13 th March, otherwise heard at Rio Tamuja on 15 th March and Arrocampo on 17 th March.
Hoopoe	Commonly seen everyday.
Green Woodpecker	Seen and heard at Finca Santa Marta most mornings.
Great Spotted Woodpecker	One seen (and two drumming) at Monfragüe castle on 12 th March and one at Finca Santa Marta on 16 th March.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Female drumming at entrance of Finca Santa Marta on 13 th and 14 th March.
Calandra Lark	Seen on each visit to open plains (probably over 30 seen on Belén Plains on 11 th March), a characteristic and evocative song of this habitat.
Crested Lark	Common and seen daily.
Thekla Lark	Present in suitable habitat, two seen especially on hills above Madroñera.
Skylark	Small flocks of this winter visitor seen on Belén Plains on 11 th March and on ricefields on 13 th March.
Sand Martin	Two at Casas del Hito on 13 th March and about 10 at Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Crag Martin	Common near bridges crossing Almonte river and in rocky areas in Monfragüe and in the Villuercus mountains, also present in Trujillo
Swallow	Common every day.
Red-rumped Swallow	Seen daily perched on a low TV aerial at Finca Santa Marta
House Martin	Common every day.
Meadow Pipit	Small numbers seen almost daily.
Water Pipit	Individuals coming into breeding plumage on rice fields at Vegas Altas 13 th March.
Grey Wagtail	One at Rio Almonte near Cabañas del Castillo on 14 th March.
White Wagtail	Small numbers seen daily.

Wren	Recorded daily.
Robin	Small numbers seen daily.
Black Redstart	Present around the Finca and also seen at Monfragüe on 12 th March and Cabañas del Castillo on 14 th March, where at least six present.
Stonechat	Common and seen every day.
Black Wheatear	Excellent views of two birds at Cabañas del Castillo on 14 th March.
Blue Rock Thrush	Seen in Monfragüe on 12 th March and Cabañas del Castillo on 14 th March.
Blackbird	Seen daily.
Song Thrush	Seen daily.
Mistle Thrush	Seen in deshesa near Aldeacentenera on 14 th March.
Cetti's Warbler	Heard on the rice fields on 13 th March and at Arrocampo on 16 th March, including one bird seen.
Zitting Cisticola	Recorded on Belén Plains on 11 th March, the rice fields on 13 th March and Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Savi's Warbler	One singing at Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Sedge Warbler	One burst of song heard at Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Dartford Warbler	One singing above Madroñera on 11 th March.
Sardinian Warbler	Seen daily.
Blackcap	Seen daily and in good numbers around Finca.
Chiffchaff	Seen daily and especially numerous in waterside vegetation.
Long-tailed Tit	Small numbers seen most days.
Blue Tit	Seen daily.
Great Tit	Seen daily.
Short-toed Treecreeper	Seen and heard almost daily, especially around the Finca.
Southern Grey Shrike	Seen almost daily.
Jay	One near Madroñera on 11 th March, two seen at Monfragüe on 12 th March and one near Cabañas del Castillo on 14 th March
Azure-winged Magpie	Commonly seen everyday.
Magpie	Commonly seen every day.
Red-billed Chough	One at the castle at Monfragüe on 12 th March.
Jackdaw	Commonly seen everyday.
Raven	Seen daily, a flock of about 100 west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 15 th March.

Spotless Starling	Common every day.
House Sparrow	Common every day.
Spanish Sparrow	Seen commonly most days, often in large flocks.
Tree Sparrow	Two at Vegas Altas on 13 th March.
Rock Sparrow	Seen on two mornings at entrance of Finca.
Common Waxbill	Small flocks at Arrocampo on 16 th March.
Red Avadavat	Small flocks on the rice fields on 13 th March.
Chaffinch	Small numbers seen every day.
Serin	Seen very day, often in song-flight.
Greenfinch	Seen almost daily near the Finca.
Goldfinch	Small flocks seen daily: over 40 on Belén Plains.
Linnet	Seen daily.
Hawfinch	Recorded almost every morning at the Finca, as well as around the castle at Monfragüe on 12 th March.
Rock Bunting	Seen at Monfragüe on 12 th March and Cabañas del Castillo on 14 th March.
Corn Bunting	Seen daily. One of the commonest birds of the plains.

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Names of mammals, reptiles and amphibians follow those in Chris Gibson's *Dorling Kindesley's Pocket Nature: Wild Animals*.

MAMMALS

Red deer *Cervus elaphus*

Iberian hare *Lepus granatensis*

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Spanish (stripe-necked) terrapin *Mauremys leprosa*

Ladder snake *Rhinechis scalaris* (dead)

Large psammmodromus *Psammmodromus algirus*

Iberian wall lizard *Podarcis hispanica*

Moorish gecko *Tarentola mauretana*

Natterjack toad *Bufo calamita* (heard)

Iberian water frog (*Rana perezii*)

BUTTERFLIES

Swallowtail

Spanish Festoon

Large White

Western Dappled White

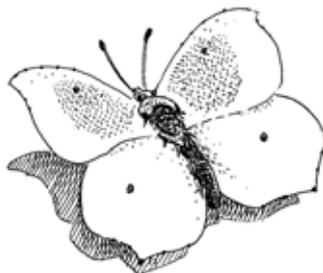
Bath White

Clouded Yellow

Cleopatra (*right*)

Nettle-tree Butterfly

Large Tortoiseshell



Red Admiral

Painted Lady

Small Heath

Wall Brown

Provence Hairstreak

Small Copper

Holly Blue

Brown Argus

OTHER NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES

Egyptian grasshopper/locust *Anacridium aegyptium*
Stick-insect like grasshopper *Acrida ungarica*
7-spot ladybird *Coccinella 7-punctata*
A ground bug *Lygaeus equestris*
Hummingbird hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum*
Caterpillars of the tiger moth *Ocnognyna boetica*
Violet carpenter bee *Xylocopa violacea*
A bee-fly sp (*Bombyliidae*)
Large ant possibly *Camponotus vagus*
Centipede *Scutigera coleoptrata*

PLANTS

Numbers on the right refer to Blamey & Grey-Wilson, *Mediterranean Wild Flowers*.
Polunin refers to Polunin & Smythies, *Flowers of south-west Europe*.
Some are planted, marked P. NiF = not in flower.
Common northern European plants e.g. shepherd's purse, groundsel, are not usually noted;
planted trees are only noted when of special interest.

Pinaceae	<i>Pinus pinea</i>	Stone / umbrella pine (3)
Cupressaceae	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	Common juniper (13)
Fagaceae	<i>Quercus rotundifolia</i> <i>Quercus suber</i>	Evergreen oak (26) Cork oak (27)
Ulmaceae	<i>Ulmus minor</i> <i>Celtis australis</i> P	Elm sp. (c. 38) Southern nettle-tree (39)
Urticaceae	<i>Urtica membranacea</i> <i>U. urens</i>	Membranous nettle (49) Annual nettle (-)
Aristolochiaceae	<i>Aristolochia sp</i>	Birthwort sp. (c. 64) NiF
Caryophyllaceae	<i>Paronychia argentea</i> <i>Spergularia arvensis</i> <i>Spergularia purpurea</i> <i>Silene colorata</i>	Paronychia (136) Corn spurrey (-) Purple sand-spurrey (148) Campion sp. (180)
Ranunculaceae	<i>Ranunculus sp.</i> <i>Ranunculus macrophyllus</i> <i>Ranunculus sceleratus</i>	Water crowfoot sp. Large-leaved buttercup (237) Celery-leaved buttercup (251)
Fumariaceae	<i>Fumaria capreolata</i>	Ramping fumitory (303)
Cruciferae	<i>Matthiola lunata</i> <i>Brassica nigra</i> The abundant yellow crucifer in fields and on disturbed ground everywhere may well be this species – to be confirmed. <i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i>	A stock (photo in Polunin) Black mustard Wild radish (369)
Resedaceae	<i>Sesamoides canescens</i>	Sesamoides (a small <i>Reseda</i>) (Polunin 375a)
Crassulaceae	<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort (396)
Rosaceae	<i>Rosa canina</i>	Common dogrose (c.404)

Saxifragaceae	<i>Saxifraga tridactyla</i> <i>Saxifraga granulata</i>	Rue-leaved saxifrage Meadow saxifrage
Leguminosae	<i>Acacia dealbata</i> <i>Adenocarpus argyrophyllus</i> <i>Astragalus lusitanicus</i> <i>Cercis siliquastrum</i> P <i>Cytisus multiflorus</i> <i>Cytisus scoparius</i> <i>Hedysarum glomeratum</i> A <i>Lathyrus cicera</i> <i>Lupinus angustifolius</i> <i>Medicago arabica</i>	P 'Mimosa' or Silver wattle (432) Spanish adenocarpus (endemic to Extremadura - in neither book) Iberian milk-vetch (504) Judas tree (430) NiF White broom Broom (456) A sainfoin (714) A vetchling of cultivated fields (545) Narrow-leaved lupin (486) Spotted medick (623) NiF
Oxalidaceae	<i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>	Bermuda buttercup (735)
Geraniaceae	<i>Geranium lucidum</i> <i>Geranium molle</i> <i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	Shining cranesbill Dovesfoot cranesbill (741) Common storksbill (761)
Euphorbiaceae	<i>Mercurialis annua</i>	Annual mercury (820)
Meliaceae	<i>Melia azedarach</i> P	Indian bead tree or Persian lilac (843) NiF
Violaceae	<i>Viola (arvensis) kitaibeliana</i>	Dwarf pansy (931)
Cistaceae	<i>Cistus albidus</i> <i>Cistus salviifolius</i> <i>Cistus ladanifer</i> <i>Tuberaria guttata</i>	Grey-leaved cistus (big pink fls) (961) Sage-leaved cistus (small white) (965) Gum cistus (big white fls) (971) Spotted rockrose (small yellow) (985)
Cactaceae	<i>Opuntia maxima</i> (= <i>ficus-indica</i>)	Prickly pear (1040)
Umbelliferae	<i>Ferula communis</i> <i>Smyrniololustatum</i> <i>Scandix pecten-veneris</i>	Giant fennel (1141) NiF Alexanders (1087) Shepherd's needle (1097)
Ericaceae	<i>Arbutus unedo</i> <i>Erica arborea</i> <i>Erica lusitanica</i>	Strawberry tree (1176) NiF Tree heath (pink fls in EX) (1178) Portuguese heath (white fls) (1179)
Primulaceae	<i>Anagallis arvensis</i>	Scarlet pimpernel (blue-flowered version) (1198)
Rubiaceae	<i>Galium verticillatum</i>	a tiny bedstraw (1299)
Oleaceae	<i>Phillyrea angustifolia</i> <i>Olea europaea</i> <i>Olea europaea</i> spp <i>Oleaster</i>	(1246) Olive (1248) Wild olive (1248a)
Boraginaceae	<i>Buglossoides arvensis</i> <i>Nonea sp. prob vesicaria</i> <i>Anchusa undulata</i>	Corn gromwell (1349) A nonea, in a wall at Finca Santa Marta (1375) NiF Undulate anchusa (1406)
Labiatae	<i>Lamium bifidum</i> <i>Marrubium vulgare</i>	'rabbit ears' – a white-flowered deadnettle with white stripes on the leaves. Not in Blamey or Polunin! White horehound (1445) NiF

	<i>Lamium amplexicaule</i>	Henbit deadnettle (1478)
	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	Rosemary (1526)
	<i>Lavandula stoechas</i>	French lavender (1528)
Solanaceae	<i>Hyosciamus albus</i>	White henbane (1555)
Scrophulariaceae	<i>Cymbalaria muralis</i>	Ivy-leaved speedwell (1632)
	<i>Parentucellia latifolia</i>	a tiny, red bartsia type (1652)
	<i>Linaria amethystea</i>	'Amethyst' toadflax (Polunin)
	<i>Linaria spartea</i>	a yellow-flowered toadflax (Polunin)
Caprifoliaceae	<i>Lonicera caprifolium</i>	Perfoliate honeysuckle (Polunin etc)
	<i>Viburnum tinus</i>	Laurestinus (1711)
Campanulaceae	<i>Jasione crispa</i>	Dwarf sheep's bit (Polunin 1355c, but illustrated in Blamey / Grey-Wilson's Alpine flowers)
Compositae	<i>Anthemis</i> sp. <i>arvensis</i> ?	An abundant white (corn?) mayweed
	<i>Bellis annua</i>	Annual daisy (1791)
	<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Perennial daisy (1792)
	<i>Bellis sylvestris</i>	Southern daisy (1793)
	<i>Calendula arvensis</i>	Field marigold (1908)
	<i>Evax pygmaea</i>	Evax (1805)
	<i>Galactites tomentosa</i>	Galactites (1971)
	<i>Silybum marianum</i>	Milk Thistle (1982) NiF
Liliaceae	<i>Asphodelus fistulosus</i>	Hollow-leaved asphodel (2087)
	<i>Asphodelus aestivus</i>	Common asphodel (2089)
	<i>Gagea</i> sp. <i>pratensis</i> ?	Yellow star-of-Bethlehem sp. (c 2106)
	<i>Fritillaria lusitanica</i>	Iberian fritillary (2152)
	<i>Urginea maritima</i>	Sea squill (leaves & dead flower spikes) (2163)
	<i>Hyacinthoides hispanica</i>	Spanish bluebell (2191)
	<i>Muscari neglectum</i>	Grape hyacinth (2206)
	<i>Narcissus triandrus papyraceus</i>	Angel's tears (Polunin)
	<i>Narcissus jonquilla</i>	Common jonquil (2279)
	<i>Narcissus bulbocodium</i>	Hoop-petticoat narcissus (2281)
Iridaceae	<i>Gynandrisis sisyrrinchium</i>	Barbary nut iris (2305)
	<i>Romulea</i> sp	Sand crocus (c 2320)
Orchidaceae:	<i>Orchis (morio) champagneuxii</i>	Champagne orchid (2403)
	<i>Orchis lactea</i>	Milky orchid (2408)
	<i>Orchis italica</i>	Naked man orchid (2409)
	<i>Ophrys tenthredinifera</i>	Sawfly orchid (2442)
Gramineae:	<i>Lamarckia aurea</i>	Golden dog's-tail (2459)
	<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	Lesser reedmace
	<i>Arundo donax</i>	Giant reed (2494)
FERNS (PTERIDOPHYTA)		
	<i>Cheilanthes</i> sp.	(c 2521)
	<i>Ceterach officinarum</i>	Rusty-back fern (2532)
	<i>Polypodium cambricum</i>	Southern polypody (2538)