

Spain

Extremadura & Gredos

Wed 15th – Wed 22nd May 2019



Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): Ortolan Bunting • Iberian Grey Shrike • Spanish Ibex • Cinereous and Griffon Vultures • Schreiber's Green Lizard • Eurasian Hoopoe with Egyptian Grasshopper © Mike Crewe/Limosa Holidays

**Report compiled by tour leader:
Mike Crewe**

Spain | Extremadura & Gredos

Tour leaders: Mike Crewe & Fernando Enrique

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Daily Diary

Day 1 – Wednesday, May 15th 2019

Winging our way south courtesy of Iberia, we were soon dropping down into Madrid and sorting out vehicle formalities. Our local guide, Fernando, had been rushed into hospital with kidney stones a couple of days prior to the start of the trip, so it was down to technology to get us out of the capital and winging our way westward. Before long, we pulled in to our favourite roadside eatery and we were soon tucking in to our first *tapas* selection. With a fair journey ahead, we pressed on, noting a nice array of raptors along the way – especially Marsh Harriers, Red and Black Kites and, best of all, at least eight Cinereous Vultures.

There was time for one lengthier stop, so we visited some wetlands at the Arrocampo Reservoir for a welcome break from travelling. A host of swallows and martins wheeled around overhead and the clamour of Great Reed Warblers seemed to be everywhere around us. A distant Savi's Warbler reeled briefly but stayed hidden, but the best action came from the fringes of the great bulrush stands. Here, carefully watching revealed three Little Bitterns that all showed well in flight and, eventually, a chunky Western Swamphen which was munching the flower spikes of the bulrushes. Cattle Egrets plied back and forth and a total of five Eurasian Spoonbills put in an appearance. We pressed on to our wonderful rural hotel, arriving in time to enjoy our first Iberian Magpies, followed by the first of many delicious dinners that would be placed before us during the course of the week. All that remained was to try to get to sleep with that flippin' Nightingale banging on (!).

Day 2 – Thursday, May 16th 2019

Everyone was up and keen for a pre-breakfast walk today, which took us just a short way along the lane from the hotel. Birds were wonderfully common here, bringing back fond memories of better times back home in the UK. Barn and Red-rumped Swallows swooped overhead, Spotless Starlings, Great Tits and Blue Tits busied themselves with recently-fledged young, Cuckoos called in the distance and Hoopoes flung themselves our way.

Before long, we were saddled up and heading out, our first day seeing us heading northward to the wonderful surrounds of Monfrague National Park. The forecast was for a very warm day today, but with temperatures lower for the rest of the week, so we took the opportunity to go raptor watching while conditions were right. In the event, the temperature rose to some 32C during the day! Our first port of call was the spectacularly scenic Ermita de Monfrague, where an ancient hermitage and fortified keep overlooks a remarkable vista of rocky crags, rockrose scrub and *dehesa*. While our hope here was to get eye-to-eye contact with vultures as the took to rising thermals, we ended up enjoying a wider range of experiences. The vultures kept their distance (for now) but we enjoyed a wide range of other birds, including busy families of Hawfinches, Red-rumped Swallows and singing Woodlarks. Non-bird enjoyment came from Spanish Marbled Whites and Large Psammadromus, among other things.

Back down at the main road, we stopped at Salto del Gitano, the famous viewpoint that overlooks the very impressive vulture colony at Penafalcon. Griffon Vultures dominated the scene here, but Black Storks were on their nests, too, while a pair of Peregrines were clearly nesting near the top of the lofty peak. A Short-toed Treecreeper became a 'rockcreeper' briefly, Crag Martins performed hair-parting sorties over us and Blue Rock Thrushes sang from several prominent rocks. We spent most of the morning soaking up the atmosphere of these two locations, before pushing on to check out Alpine Swifts and Rock Doves at a near-by bridge. After a quick loo stop, we headed for what we hoped would be a peaceful lunch, but didn't reckon on the swarm of Griffon and Cinereous Vultures that persisted in tempting us away from our sandwiches! Time was getting on and we continued to another viewpoint towards the far end of the park, but the increasing heat and rather windy conditions provided little in entertainment here. As we had a special dinner arrangement in town tonight, we began our return journey early, then reconvened to head into Trujillo to have a look around the magnificent town square and 13th century castle before dinner. Pallid Swifts and Lesser Kestrels were picked out from the castle's lofty overlook and White Storks entertained us at their nests.

Day 3 – Friday, May 17th 2019

The weather forecasters got it right as we awoke to a shivering 8C this morning! The pre-breakfast walk offered much the same as yesterday – which is nothing to be sniffed at – and included a showy Melodious Warbler, but

the warm-up over breakfast was certainly much enjoyed! In contrast to the open woods and scrubby habitats of yesterday, we spent most of today on the *llanos* -the great, sweeping grassy plains that extend out beyond Trujillo and Caceres. Stopping at our first roadside pull-off, we were soon immersed in a cacophony of larks and, over the course of the day, we got to grips with Crested versus Thekla Larks (well, just about if we ignore those inbetweenies!), those fabulously chunky Calandra Larks and a handful of Greater Short-toed Larks, the latter confined to barer areas.

Fence posts and wires offered up Iberian and Woodchat Shrikes for us to enjoy and we picked out a Rock Sparrow feeding its youngsters on the ground close to the van. One of our main quests today was to seek out the region's bustards and, although the record dry winter and spring seemed to have advanced the season adversely for us, we did manage to notch up a few Great Bustards during the day. Both Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse also put on good performances for us as they ferried back and forth to favoured watering holes. Raptors were plentiful, as ever and included some amazing views of Griffon and Cinereous Vultures at dead sheep, as well as hunting Booted Eagles and Common Buzzards.

Our route took us along some quieter back roads, where nest boxes had been erected for the declining European Roller population and the sounds of delight from the van upon finding some of these birds confirmed that this would be one of the trip highlights. It had been a pretty full day of experiences in a seemingly timeless landscape, which for me was personified by the great, swirling flocks of chirpy Spanish Sparrows as we began to head back for dinner.

Day 4 – Saturday, May 18th 2019

Another 8C start to the day almost saw the thermals coming out – if only we had brought them! After a breakfast warm up and a vote for hot coffee not iced water with lunch (we had got it wrong the past two days!!), we visited yet another different suite of Extremaduran habitats as we headed south. We did, however, begin with the familiar, as we worked the roads near Campo Lugar to try to fill a few gaps in the bird list from yesterday. Cruising another area of grassy plains, we turned up another couple of Great Bustards but their smaller cousins were living up to their name! Perhaps the stars of this morning's birding were the Hoopoes, which gave great views – especially that one that sat eying us up from the bottom of a gate...

Circling back around on ourselves, we took in the margins of the reservoir at Alcollarin. The water level was surprisingly low for the time of year and meant that the margins were rather too far to scan successfully from the road. However, we found a scattering of Great Crested Grebes and Eurasian Coots out on the water, with Black-headed Gulls mooching around, too. A small party of migrant Ringed Plovers was a surprise find, as was a single Pied Avocet which was feeding near a small gathering of Great Cormorants and assorted egrets. At our lunch stop, we found a large gathering of birds, with both Little and Cattle Egrets resting on the water's edge and nesting in the trees, while a Squacco Heron was an unexpected bonus. An Egyptian Goose was one of a small population in the area and tried very hard to look like a Gadwall – or was it the other way round!

Further south, we cruised the dirt roads around the rice fields near Madrigalejo and Vegas Altas. Here we kept getting glimpses of Common Waxbills and Red Avadavats, but they just kept sweeping off like little buzz bombs before most of us could get a proper look... The dry season probably was at least in part responsible for the absence of any migratory waders in the area, but seven Northern Lapwings remained from the wintering population. We also took time to visit a nearby bridge where Eurasian and Great Reed Warblers were singing and an Iberian Grey Shrike showed well. Our last birding location for the day was at the private reserve at Finca Moheda Alta. Although the rice fields were dry and as yet mostly unplanted, the nearby scrub provided us with some nice birds, the best of which was a Black-winged Kite. Sardinian Warblers had been largely elusive up until now, but a female rummaged around on the track for a minute or two. A nice surprise was in store for us this evening, as Fernando had passed his unwanted lodger and was back in rude health, so had made the four-hour drive up from his home to join us for the rest of the trip.

Day 5 – Sunday, May 19th 2019

After a review of the list so far, we decided on a return visit to the grassy plains to try to catch up with some of the species that had eluded us today. Before this, however, we took our usual pre-breakfast constitutional and turned up a lovely, perched, male Golden Oriole. Well, it's fair to say that the Little Bustards continued to escape our gaze today, but we nevertheless had an eventful day. Great Bustards and both sandgrouse species continued to grace us with their presence, while less windy conditions brought out a few more butterflies and other insects to enjoy. Two Great Spotted Cuckoos flew along a ridge, distant but readily identifiable. Booted and Short-toed Eagles continued to entertain us overhead and a second attempt at the endangered Spanish Imperial Eagle was successful as we enjoyed a smart, white-shouldered adult.

A section of the Rio Magasca gave us a Common Kingfisher and both Grey and White Wagtails before we headed for a picnic lunch overlooking another of the region's small rivers that cut their course through the rocky terrain. These rivers not only gave us nice birds to look at, but we were also entertained by Spanish Water Frogs, Spanish Terrapins and Viperine Snakes, too (the latter not everyone's cup of tea!). We took a different route back today, via the Monroy road and more open grassland, but the bustards remained notable by their absence. A female Montagu's Harrier was a nice addition, however, while we marvelled at the sheer number of White Stork nests in the region.

After dinner, we ventured out again, firstly checking out a local Eurasian Eagle Owl nest site. Unfortunately, the chicks had fledged and no-one was home, but we could certainly see where they had been! As darkness shrouded the hills, we headed into town and had much better luck with a pair of Eurasian Scops Owls, both of which showed very well from a line of date palms.

Day 6 – Monday, May 20th 2019

It's never easy to leave somewhere as wonderful as the plains around Trujillo, but the mountains were beckoning and, after a hearty breakfast, we said our goodbyes to the wonderful finca staff and began our northward journey. We started by retracing our route to Monfrague and spent a little time overlooking Penafalcon again. This time, the White-rumped Swifts chose not to show up, but raptor activity was exciting as ever, with a supporting cast of Blue Rock Thrushes, Crag Martins, Rock Buntings and more. Without the winds of our last visit, we also managed good views of an obliging male Subalpine Warbler. Further on, a brief stop for Bonelli's Eagle didn't work out, but did get us some Spanish Gatekeepers, while the nearby visitor centre provided a very nice male Black-eared Wheatear.

We now had to make a fairly lengthy drive to get up into the foothills of the Sierra de Gredos. Passing through Spain's 'cherry capital', the Jerte valley, Fernando very generously treated us to a whole box of local produce – which went down very well over the coming days and was much appreciated. At the head of the valley, we climbed up to Puerto de Tornavacas and found a great spot for lunch, surrounded by a bewildering array of flowering broom species and a nice array of raptors overhead. Common Whitethroats and Western Bonelli's Warblers were singing here in good quantity and Guadarrama Wall Lizards were enjoying a nearby wall. After lunch, we took a favourite dirt road of Fernando's and found a nice male Red-backed Shrike and some very obliging Ortolan Buntings.

We still had a fair way to go, so we pressed on into the Gredos mountains until we reached Hoyos del Espino. A cruise into the fields and pine woods near here gave us our first look at the Iberian race of Pied Flycatcher with a nice male in full song. Serins danced around in pairs all over the place and Coal Tits and Melodious Warblers had become commonplace. A little further on, a tumbling stream provided ideal habitat for a White-throated Dipper, which duly appeared.

Day 7 – Tuesday, May 21st 2019

We had a full day up in the Sierra de Gredos today, beginning with a pre-breakfast stroll around the hotel. While we enjoyed a nice array of upland birds, Citril Finch was our real target and so began a catalogue of single-observer sightings over the next couple of mornings! Most of us had to make do with other birds, but there was plenty to enjoy.

After breakfast we headed out on the road that eventually leads up to the Plataforma de Gredos and access to birding above the treeline. But we checked the pinewoods again first, finding more Pied Flycatchers and beginning a nice run of Common Crossbill sightings. Crested and Coal Tits graced the trees and we finally got very good views of a Western Bonelli's Warbler, as well as what was to be the first of a number of Northern Wheatears today. A little further on we found breeding Common Whitethroats and Iberian Yellow Wagtails, then we passed into the broom zone and we were soon surrounded by singing Dunnocks and Ortolan Buntings.

From the car park, we found singing male Common Rock Thrushes and some impressive Spanish Ibex that watched our progress as we headed up the stony trail to even higher ground. We were easily side tracked along the way by a host of interesting mountain plants and a couple of endemic reptiles – Cyran's Rock Lizard and Schreiber's Green Lizard, both of which showed well and hung around for photo sessions. But our chief prize lay further on and had to wait until after we had eaten picnic lunches; a Golden Eagle being mobbed by a Booted Eagle made the wait a little more tolerable, but eventually, it was only those who ventured further than we had hoped who were able to enjoy a singing male Bluethroat of this strangely isolated population. The walk back down went quicker than the walk up and terminated with better views of Common Rock Thrushes and Spanish Ibex.

A celebration seemed in order so we took a break for ice-creams or hot chocolate, some fabulous views and a posing Nightingale before heading back to base and preparing for another voluminous dinner.

Day 8 – Wednesday, May 22nd 2019

With warnings of strike action at the airport, we left earlier than we might have done, although in the event the airport proved to be running smoothly. Even so, there was plenty of time for Citril searches so we cruised some little back roads and checked an array of grassy meadows in the area. The same White-throated Dipper was on its little piece of river and we added a Hobby to the ever-growing species list. Mammals did themselves proud today, too, with Eurasian Red Squirrel, Red Fox and Western Roe Deer all new for the trip. Eventually, though, it was time for final packing, the paying of bills and the haul back to Madrid, while Fernando began his lengthy drive back south again.

It had been an amazing week of wonderful Iberian wildlife, some of the best of regional Spanish food and drink (including that acorn liqueur!) and some wonderful company. We look forward to seeing you all again soon on another Limosa adventure...

Annotated List of Birds Recorded (Total species - 125)

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

One at Alcollarin on 18th.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

One to two on three dates at various wetland areas.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Widespread in small numbers at wetlands throughout the area.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Apart from a sadly flattened one on the road, we saw a couple of singles on 19th around Santa Marta de Magasca.

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Heard calling while we are at the bridge near Vegas Altas on 18th.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Odd pairs scattered around the various watering holes that we passed, including a mum carrying her chicks on her back.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

A scattering of birds at Alcollarin on 18th.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

At least five at Monfrague, including chicks in a nest on 16th and at least four there on 20th.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Plentiful throughout the area, with many birds attending nests and the occasional 'bill-clapping' display heard. A real highlight of any visit to the region.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

A line of four and a singleton seen in flight at Arrocampo on 15th.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

A male and two females seen nicely at Arrocampo on 15th.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

A full breeding-plumaged bird was seen at the water's edge at Alcollarin on 18th.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Common and noted daily in the lowlands, with some lovely ginger-tinged birds in all their breeding finery.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

One to three on six dates in the lowlands.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

One seen by some of the group at Arrocampo on 15th.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

This eastern species continues to expand its range in Western Europe; at least four at Alcollarin on 18th and two at Arrocampo on 15th.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Noted in small numbers around wetlands to the south on 18th.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A small scattering of birds at wetlands and reservoirs, with around 20 the highest count at Alcollarin.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

Brief but good views of one at Moheda Alta on 18th was a nice treat.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

A severely declining species, but we saw perhaps 10 different during the week, including an adult on a nest and several soaring birds around Monfrague.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

One was seen by most of the group over the Monfrague visitor centre on 20th.

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*

The large numbers of these stately birds around Extremadura is one of the true highlights of a visit to the region. We were treated to some wonderful views, especially around Monfrague and at that roadside gathering first thing one morning.

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*

Wonderful to be able to say that we saw this species every day! Some great views of these regal giants, both in flight and on the ground.

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

One to three on five dates. Always an imposing bird with its long, broad wings.

Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*

Seen every day of the trip and providing some excellent views of both light and dark morph birds.

Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti*

Fernando produced a fine adult for us near a nest site on the plains on 19th.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

One seen distantly over the plains near Santa Magasca on 17th and another seen better at Gredos on 21st.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

A distant bird rose up behind Penafalcon and disappeared behind the rock on 20th.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

One seen near Penafalcon on 16th and one over the Parador on 21st but only distantly seen by a few people.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Small numbers on four dates, mostly involving roadside birds as we travelled.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

Just a single female near Monroy on 19th highlights the serious decline of this species in recent years.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

A half dozen seen as we drove west on 15th but then just the odd singleton here and there around the plains.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

A common species during the summer months and noted daily, especially around the plains. Also some great views of twig-carrying birds at Monfrague.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

A scattering of roadside birds noted almost daily throughout, most often on utility poles in the early morning.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

Heat haze always causes problems when trying to view these birds, but at least two that we saw were quite close especially the female that appeared to be feeding a chick that was hidden in the grass on 19th.

Western Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Formerly Purple Gallinule, this species is doing quite well in south-west Europe and it continues to spread into new territory in Spain. Several calling and one seen well on our visit to Arrocampo on 15th.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

At least three at Arrocampo on 15th and six at various wetlands on 18th.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

A handful of birds noted at Alcollarin on 18th.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

One was a surprise find on the reservoir at Alcollarin on 18th.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Small numbers noted at the main reservoirs, as well as on some of the watering holes on the plains.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Seven birds were counted in the ricefields on 7th.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

A party of six migrants was at Alcollarin on 18th.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Two at Alcollarin on 18th and one near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19th.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

One seen from the high bridge at Monfrague on 16th.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

About 20 or so seen at Alcollarin on 18th.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*

Some lovely views of birds on the ground and in the air in the Santa Marta area, with totals of 15 on 17th and at least 10 on 19th.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*

Three near Santa Marta on 17th, four near Campo Lugar on 18th and 10 in the Santa Marta area on 19th – and we heard that wonderful bubbly chuckle!

Rock Dove/Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Noted throughout the tour with a wide range of colour forms present, but birds around the high bridge at Monfrague were typically marked for wild birds.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Small numbers noted on a daily basis.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Sadly, remarkably scarce with just one seen and another heard on 16th.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Small numbers daily around human habitation.

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*

Fernando picked out two that were flying along the horizon near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19th.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Heard daily and at least four birds seen at various locations during the week.

Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops*

A brief sortie into town on the evening of 19th gave us wonderful views of a pair of these birds.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Seemed unwilling to show themselves this year and it took a lot of zoom on the scope to pick one out on a roof near Santa Marta de Magasca on 19th.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

At least three birds gave us excellent views around the high bridge at Monfrague on 16th, while some of the group also saw this species at Monfrague during our travel day on 20th.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Small numbers noted daily and some nice views of birds sweeping around Trujillo on the evening of 16th.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*

At least three picked out amongst feeding flocks of swifts on 15th at Arrocampo and another three seen over Trujillo on 16th.

White-rumped Swift *Apus caffer*

Tim did well to pick out the first birds at Penafalcon on 16th and we finished with at least four flying around there, but unfortunately, they remained distant from us.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*

Wonderful views of this spectacular species as they busied themselves around nestboxes and chased around after each other. A few odd singles elsewhere ensured we all had a chance to enjoy this lovely bird.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One to two on three dates at reservoirs and rocky streams.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

A bird that seems too exotic to be European! Some lovely views of perched birds near small breeding colonies in open banks. Noted every day except in the highest locations.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Always a celebrity! You can never see too many of these birds, and we managed to see good numbers – almost always in pairs – on most days.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Only in the Gredos area, where one or two birds were logged daily from 20th to 22nd.

Iberian Green Woodpecker *Picus sharpei*

Not seen well, but a couple of singles were glimpsed around Hoyos del Espino. Recently upgraded to species level and split from our familiar Green Woodpecker.

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*

These slender beasties showed pretty well (eventually!) from the castle esplanade at Trujillo on 16th, while we also noted small numbers scattered around the lowlands daily to 19th.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

A regular roadside bird with small numbers noted on most days.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

A nice finale and our last new bird for the trip! One seen near Hoyos del Espino on the morning of 22nd.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

A breeding pair at Penafalcon gave us plenty of entertainment, including a food pass at one point.

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus*

Two seen flying over the motorway as we left Madrid on 15th and another three seen there on 22nd. Populations of over 6,000 individuals of this species are estimated to be at large in both Madrid and Barcelona and the species is now being considered a major pest, having been introduced from Argentina.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Just a single bird this year, but a nice male, at Puerto de Tornovacas on 20th.

Iberian Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*

A relatively common species in Extremadura with roadside singles and pairs noted on a regular basis, especially in *dehesa* country. Recently split from Great Grey Shrike as a separate species.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

Two to six noted on five dates, with best views of roadside birds from the van on 17th.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Heard regularly around our hotel in the mornings and a nice male seen especially well there on 19th. Also, one or two glimpses of birds dashing across roads during the week.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Elusive and shy, one or two were noted on five dates, most often around the Gredos area.

Iberian Magpie *Cyanopica cooki*

One of the star birds of the holiday, this species is now recognised as an Iberian endemic, after long having been thought to have been possibly introduced from the Far East by early traders. This idea was laid to rest after sub-fossil bones of this species were found in caves in Gibraltar, dating the species' existence in the area to well before a time when any traders could have brought them here. A common feature of the *dehesa*, but absent from the Gredos area; one pair regularly checked us out through the window during our list sessions of an evening!

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Common and widespread, but well upstaged by the previous species!

Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Local, but can occur in good numbers, such as around Madrigalejo and Trujillo.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Only in the Gredos area, where small numbers were seen daily from 20th.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

Some good numbers seen daily, including gatherings of over 30 birds on two occasions.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Common in the pine woods of Gredos and seen well around the Parador, where we noted the blue back of these continental birds.

European Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*

Quite common around Gredos in the pine woods but far more were heard than seen – though we did get some nice views of this smart species.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Small numbers daily in woodland and around habitation.

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Small numbers daily in woodland and around habitation.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Noted on four dates with the wonderful song rippling across the landscape on early mornings. Some nice scope views of birds on wires and phone poles, too.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

A species of high grasslands during the summer in Spain and good numbers were present at Plataforma de Gredos on 21st during our Bluethroat quest.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*

Widespread but local and more often in uncultivated areas and areas of rocky ground than is the case for Crested Lark. Some obliging birds allowed close views, revealing their heavily spotted chests and stubbier bills, as well as their distinctive, rising contact calls.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Widespread and common and often filling the niche of a European roadrunner!

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Localised and favouring rather bare areas with little grass cover. Three seen near Santa Marta on 17th and four near Campo Lugar on 18th.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*

Common in suitable habitat, with the largest numbers seeming to favour land where there had been at least some cultivation. The wonderful rolling song of this species, with much mimicry thrown in, as well as its

distinctive long wings with dark undersides and white trailing edges are a great feature of the area.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Six seen at Arrocampo on 15th.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common and seen daily in good numbers, including many fledged youngsters. I particularly enjoyed that noisy street individual in Trujillo!

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Widespread and recorded on five dates. Tame and approachable, with some lovely close views at times.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Noted daily and wonderfully common in places, where their nests filled every available space under bridges.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

A common feature of roadside culverts and bridges and seen gliding effortlessly on a daily basis.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Top award for skulking always goes to this species, which has no physical form – just a voice on the breeze!

Heard on four dates but we only ever had brief glimpses at the best.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Noisy family parties were heard or seen around our hotel and at Monfrague on four dates.

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*

Heard singing in deciduous oak and pine woods from Tornovacas onward and a few seen very well around Hoyos del Espino on 21st.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

At least 10 singing from the tops of the bulrushes at Arrocampo on 15th and four at the river bridge near Vegas Altas on 18th.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

A few heard at Arrocampo on 15th and several chasing around at the river bridge near Vegas Altas on 18th.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

One showed nicely on our pre-breakfast walk on 17th, then we enjoyed quite a few in scrubby habitats around Gredos from 20th onward.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

The mechanical 'reeling' of this species was heard at Arrocampo on 15th but the bird was too distant to locate.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

A few roadside skulkers were seen in bouncing song flight on 15th, 18th and 19th.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Often heard singing around the hotel and in wooded and scrubby areas elsewhere.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

A nice scattering of birds in the Gredos area, from Tornovacas onward.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

We noted one or two in roadside scrub on 20th and 21st (once the wind had died down!).

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

A concerted effort on 20th turned up a couple of these birds which showed well in roadside scrub.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

Widespread and heard regularly, with one or two birds noted daily in the lowlands.

Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

We had some nice close views of this little cracker around the Gredos area.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Small numbers singing and one or two seen in pine woods around the Gredos area on 21st and 22nd.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Remarkably skulking with birds heard daily but only a couple seen briefly during the course of the week.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Heard calling around the Parador and seen by some of the group on 20th and 21st.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*

One showed very well at Monfrague on 16th and one or two were heard or seen around the Parador.

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*

Widespread and very common. The song of this species is very different to that of Common Starling, though both species use much mimicry, and the rolling notes of Spotless Starlings were a regular feature of towns and villages in the area, as well as out in the *dehesa*.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Widespread in small numbers and noted daily.

Song Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Heard singing at our first hotel in the lowlands on 16th.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Four were seen by one or two of the group at Hoyos del Espino on 20th and a singleton the following day.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Heard regularly in the mornings around Gredos, but these birds are shy and we didn't get a glimpse of one.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

This species gave us a run for our money this year, but those who were able to press on a little further, eventually were rewarded with a singing male at Plataforma de Gredos on 21st. The local form has an all blue throat.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Heard daily (and nightly!) in the lowlands with most of the group getting a look at one or two during the course of the week. Perhaps best seen at our first hotel, or outside the ice-cream stop at Hoyos del Espino!

European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Lovely views of singing males in the Gredos area daily from 20th. The Spanish race, *iberiae*, has more white than other Pied Flycatcher forms and forms a cline towards the North African *speculigera* (which may or may not be a separate species!).

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Small numbers seen on four dates with some fine adult males noted. Far more common in the Gredos area than in the lowlands and singing birds were a feature of the Parador.

Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

Four lovely males seen around the Plataforma de Gredos area on 21st.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

Noted around rocky outcrops and seen especially well at Monfrague on 16th and 20th.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Very common and seen daily in good numbers on roadside fences, wires and bushes.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Territorial males were common around the Gredos area with several performing wonderful song flights.

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*

A male was seen briefly by some of the group at the Monfrague tourist centre on 16th. Much better was the smart male in the same area on 20th which we all enjoyed.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

One showed nicely on the Rio Tormes in the Gredos Mountains on 20th and 22nd.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Wonderfully common around towns, villages and out in the wider countryside. A much-maligned bird but in serious decline throughout much of its natural range.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*

Plentiful and most often seen in wheeling flocks on the grasslands or in the *dehesa*. Some good close views at times of this very smart bird.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

At least six in the Vegas Altas area on 18th, then one near the ice-cream stop at Hoyos del Espino on 21st.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

A few birds were 'zinging' from buildings and roadsides on four dates, with best views being of the female feeding young at the cattle pens on the Santa Marta road on 16th.

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*

A bit of a damp squib, as we regularly flushed small groups from roadside ditches in the Vegas Altas on 18th but failed to really get to grips with them.

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*

Reads the same as for Common Waxbill!

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

We're renaming this one 'Fernando's Delight'! Common in the broom scrub around Sierra de Gredos.

Spanish Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava iberiae*

Seen well around the rice fields on 18th and in damp meadows in the Gredos area on 21st. The males of this form are especially smart, with their blue-grey heads and white throats.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One to six noted on three dates, mostly along rivers or streams.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Regular in small numbers around towns and villages throughout the week.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

Rather elusive this year, but one or two were heard and seen at Plataforma de Gredos on 21st.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Widespread in small numbers in wooded areas and most common in the Gredos area and at Monfrague.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Family parties noted regularly around our first hotel and at Monfrague but rather skittish and evasive.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Small numbers heard or seen daily.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Small numbers noted daily but often only fly-bys.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Much to Louise's delight, we saw plenty of these in the pines around Hoyos del Espino on 20th and 22nd and a few around the Parador, too.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Plentiful, with busy pairs noted throughout the region on a daily basis.

Citril Finch *Carduelis citrinella*

The one that pretty much got away from us this year. Odd pairs or singles were seen briefly by one or two of the group in the Gredos area (especially at the parador), but we never did get this one pinned down this year.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Wonderfully common and always busy, with many males seen in manic song flight.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

A widespread species throughout the open grassland habitats and noted in good numbers daily.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

Two at Monfrague on 16th, then nice numbers in the Gredos area daily from 20th to 22nd.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

One of the highlights of the Gredos slopes. The wonderfully discordant song of this species provided a lovely backdrop in the broom zone and we had some excellent close views around Plataforma de Gredos.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

A male showed nicely for us at Monfrague on 16th.

Mammals

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* – Parador de Gredos

Iberian Hare *Lepus granatensis* – Casa Rural Vina de Torres

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* – Hoyos del Espino

Spanish Ibex *Capra pyrenaica victoriae* – Plataforma de Gredos

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* – Hoyos del Espino

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* – Monfrague

Amphibians

Stripeless Tree Frog *Hyla meridionalis* – Casa Rural Vina de Torres

Iberian Water Frog *Pelophylax perezi* – Rivers and streams

Reptiles

Spanish Terrapin *Mauremys leprosa* – pools and streams

Cyren's Rock Lizard *Iberolacerta cyreni* – Plataforma de Gredos

Schreiber's Green Lizard *Lacerta schreiberi* – Plataforma de Gredos

Guadarrama Wall Lizard *Podarcis guadarramae* – Puerto de Tornavacas

Large Psammmodromus *Psammodromus algirus* – Monfrague area

Viperine Snake *Natrix maura* – Santa Marta de Magasca area

Butterflies

Western Dappled White *Euchloe crameri*

Western Bath White *Pontia daplidice*

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Small White *Pieris rapae*

Provence Orange-tip *Anthocharis euphenoides*

Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*

Cleopatra *Gonepteryx cleopatra*

Nettle-tree Butterfly *Libythea celtis*

False Ilex Hairstreak *Satyrium esculi*

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*
 Holly Blue *Celastrina argeolus*
 Green-underside Blue *Glaucopsyche alexis*
 Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*
 Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*
 Cardinal *Argynnis pandora*
 Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia*
 Spanish Fritillary *Eurodryas desfontainii*
 Spanish Marbled White *Melanargia ines*
 Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*
 Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*
 Southern Gatekeeper *Pyronia cecilia*
 Spanish Gatekeeper *Pyronia bathseba*
 Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*
 Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera*
 Lulworth Skipper *Thymelicus acteon*

Dragonflies

Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope*
 Western Clubtail *Gomphus pulchellus*
 Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*
 Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*
 Keeled Skimmer *Orthetrum coerulescens*
 Long Skimmer *Orthetrum trinacria*

Moths

Highlights included two **Cream-spot Tigers** on the hotel wall, several **Cinnabars** around Gredos and a **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** at the Parador.

Flora

There was a wonderful wealth of flowers to enjoy during the trip, although the dry spring had denied us the full-glory of the *dehesa*. Up in the Gredos, the various broom and gorse species looked spectacular and many of the roadside verges were awash with colour. Some of the species that I know people asked about or photographed were:

Retam *Retama sphaerocarpa*
 Round-leaved Oak *Quercus rotundifolia*
 Downy Oak *Quercus pubescens*
Tolpis barbata
 Spanish Foxglove *Digitalis thlaspi*
 Spanish Oyster Plant *Scolymus hispanicus*
 Gum Cistus *Cistus ladanifer*
 French Lavender *Lavandula stoechas*
 White Broom *Cytisus multiflorus*
 Mountain Broom *Cytisus oromediterraneus*
 Elegant Toadflax *Linaria elegans*
 Gredos Lupin *Lupinus gredensis*
 Spring Squill *Scilla verna*
 Spanish Bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispanica*
 Rock Daffodil *Narcissus rupicola*
 Henbane *Hyoscyamus niger*