# WINGSPAN BIRD

## TOURS

Bird - Watching Holiday

To

### ZARAGOZA STEPPE, SPANISH PYRENEES & PICOS DE EUROPA

JUNE 12<sup>th</sup> - JUNE 20<sup>th</sup> 2017



TRIP REPORT

### **Places Visited**

TUESDAY 20<sup>TH</sup>

**PARK** 

MONDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> TRANSFER FROM MADRID AIRPORT TO FUENDETODOS WITH STOPS AT ALMUNIA AND VILLANUEVE DE HUERVA TUESDAY 13TH TRANSFER FROM FUENDETODOS TO HECHO VALLEY: STOPPING AT EL PLANERON – QUINTO DE EBRO – LOS MONEGROS WEDNESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> GARBADITO - UPPER HECHO VALLEY THURSDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> RIO ARAGON NEAR FUENTE DEL REINE - SANTA CILIA AIRFIELD -CITADEL DE JACA - CANDANCHU & ASTUN SKI RESORTS FRIDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> ANSÓ VALLEY – ZURITA – LINZA REFUGIO – RONÇAL VALLEY – **REFUGIO BELAGUA – COL DE LA PIERRE SAINT-MARTIN (1750 meters)** SATURDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> ARRÉS ROAD – MONESTERIO SAN JUAN DE LA PEÑA - RIO GALLEGO – EMBALSE DE LA SOTOÑERO - MALLOS DE RIGLOS SUNDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> TRANSFER FROM THE PYRENEES TO THE PICOS DE EUROPA – WITH STOPS AT THE EMBALSE DE EBRO AND SAINT VINCENTE DE **BARQUERA** MONDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> FUENTE DÉ - PEMBES - RIO DEVA

TRANSFER TO MADRID FOR FLIGHT HOME – EL PARDO COUNTRY

#### **PARTICIPANTS:** left to right

June Riches, Fred Fouracre, Matthew & Philip Arnold, Nigel Bleaken, Bobby (Long-lens) Longhorn, Andrew Riches



#### **LEADER:**

**Bob Buckler** 



### **Summary:**

It was another very successful Tour of these three unique and contrasting areas, the scenery was stunning, the birds were amazing and the group was fantastic, we all gelled well and everyone enjoyed the trip. If anything, the weather was too good, the Zaragoza Plains were boiling, the Pyrenees foothills were sweltering and even up on the high plateau in the Picos it was very hot. Nevertheless, we saw all of the most wanted specialities: Lammergeier, Wallcreeper, Citril Finch, Rock Thrush, Ring Ouzel, Alpine Cough, Alpine Accentor, Snowfinch, Black Woodpecker and many of the supporting cast.

In complete contrast to the rest of the week we were washed out in the Picos on our last afternoon, a heavy thunderstorm with torrential rain and hailstones lashed down, so we had to abandon our search for Middle Spotted Woodpecker.

### DAY 1 - MONDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017

### TRANSFER: MADRID TO FUENDETODOS WITH STOPS AT VILLANUEVA DE HUERVA

#### WEATHER: SUNSHINE ALL DAY. TOP TEMPERATURE 30C

Madrid Airport, my favourite place? I don't think so! However today wasn't that bad, my group turned up at various times and at various terminals, including arrivals last night. This morning some of them spent time in the plaza at Barajas where they watched a family of White Storks, dozens of Common Swifts, several Monk Parakeets, Wood Pigeons, Spotless Starlings and House Sparrows.

It was about 12:30 when we finally set off on the Tour, we made it to our turn-off at La Almunia in good time, that is where we started 'proper' birding instead of noting specks in the sky or calling flybys on the autovia. We did record White Stork, Cattle Egret, Eurasian Hoopoe, Black Kite, Common Buzzard, Griffon Vulture and several Eurasian Magpies during the autovia section of the journey.

From La Almunia we headed towards Belchite stopping at a number of places along the way, we noted Turtle Dove, Booted Eagle, Crested Lark, Black-eared Wheatear, Zitting Cisticola, more Common Buzzards and Black Kites up until we stopped at a pine woods near Villanueve de Huerva. In the woods we had a great time watching a pair of Bonelli's Warblers collecting food and visiting their nest on the ground. We also found my favourite bird, the Corn Bunting, Common Chaffinch and European Robin.



At Villanueve de Huerva we parked just outside the village and walked back to the bridge and then along a track into a cultivated area. We noted Blue Rock Thrush on the church roof, Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Serins, a Black Redstart and hundreds of hirundines and Common Swifts.

Further stops produced, Black-eared Wheatear, Red-legged Partridge (with 8 chicks), Common Stonechat and Eurasian Linnet.

At 6pm we arrived at our hotel and within 10 minutes we were all checked-in, a little later we met on the front terrace for a cold beer before going for a short walk. Behind the hotel lies a village pond, with green water and with both Black and Mute Swans, a Greylag Goose and some very dodgey looking ducks, all non-tickable.

Our walk produced nothing new except for calling Golden Orioles, we finished the walk just after that and went for dinner.

### DAY 2 – TUESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017

### TRANSFER FROM FUENDETODOS TO HECHO VALLEY WITH STOPS AT EL PLANERON – QUINTO DE EBBRO – LOS MONEGROS

WEATHER: A scorcher today! The car temp. gauge registered 41C – full on sunshine all day! No wind until late morning.

A pre-breakfast walk around the tracks and lanes on the edge of the village near our hotel produced a few good sightings but not the Golden Oriole we expected after being woken up by several of them calling!

We had great views of Orphean Warbler, several were singing but one showed particularly well we also notched our first Raven and a Cirl Bunting. After breakfast, we checked out of our hotel and headed off to El Planeròn natural park noting: Black Kite, Eurasian Hoopoe, Golden Oriole and Turtle Dove along the way.



Thread Lacewing – Photo by Bob Longhorn

El Planeròn is a huge conservation area consisting of vast tracts of pseudo steppe and is particularly noted for 'housing' the Dupont's Lark as well as several other steppe species. It really is 'Larksville', they were everywhere, we saw six species, but as expected, not the Dupont's.

We drove onto to the reserve and worked our way along the tracks stopping at various view-points, the scenery there is stunning, the distant hills are full of colour. Even at 9am the heat haze was causing difficulties with viewing distant birds, we saw Stone Curlews, Calandra and Crested Larks almost straight away.

Both Greater and Lesser Short-toed Larks ran about on the tracks and Skylarks were seen frequently, but

other than those we saw little else until we reached an area where a small pool has a tiny viewing hide. We stopped there and immediately saw two Black-bellied Sandgrouse, they flew over us not too high and showed very well in the morning light. A Black-eared Wheatear sat on a bush very close to us. A few European Bee-eaters were a little further away as was Southern Grey Shrike and a few Corn Buntings.

We visited the hide in relays, the first four were just on their way there when a Pintail Sandgrouse flew over, we all saw it but it was a little higher than the Black-bellied were just now, however, a few minutes later the bird returned and settled on the ground in full view and within easy scoping range! Fantastic, the four of us that remained had superb views of it, but because of the heat quiver we couldn't get decent pictures of it.

Whilst in the hide we had excellent views of various larks and the other four group members also watched the Pintail Sandgrouse.

Various raptors were getting up now as the heat of the day rose, may Black Kites were joined by Common Buzzard, Griffon Vultures, Booted and Short-toed Eagles and we saw both Common and

Lesser Kestrels. Another pair of Stone Curlews were noted as we made our way off the reserve and we had excellent views of a single male Montagu's Harrier.

Next we drove to Quinto where we spent a couple of hours walking along a section of the Ebro River, it was like an ox-bow lake with still water and plenty of reeds. We listed a good number of species there, the first stop produced Purple Heron, Common Kingfisher, Common Nightingale, Sand Martin, Great Reed Warbler, Little and Cattle Egrets and we heard Cetti's Warbler, Reed Warbler, Blackcap, Golden Oriole and Common Cuckoo.

A second short walk was just as good, we added sightings of Wryneck, Spotted Flycatcher, Little Ringed Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Grey Heron, Reed Warbler and more Purple Herons.

It was now extremely hot the car temperature gauge read 41C! We drove back to Quinto where we bought some lunch supplies and drove to Los Monegros an area of low open hillsides covered in scrub where we hoped to see a couple of warblers. It was hard walking in that heat but a nice breeze helped. We found a Spectacled Warbler which showed well but Dartford Warbler failed to show. Other species seen were Black-eared Wheatear and European Bee-eaters.



 $Lesser\ Kestrel-Bob\ Longhorn$ 

Many raptors were up and a distant flock of some 50 Ravens was an amazing sight! We searched for Golden Eagle which is regularly seen in the area but none materialised so we moved on.

It was now 4pm we had a couple of hours drive ahead of us so we set off passing Zaragoza, Huesca, Jaca and into the Hecho valley. We made a few short stops arriving in the Upper Hecho Valley at Hotel Uson at 6:30pm.

After settling into our rooms (I saw two Common Crossbills from my window), a repeat of what I did in on my previous trip last week in the Gredos Mountains!

We sat down to a lovely dinner served by Lucia and Imanol the owners, a lovely and most welcoming couple.

### DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017

#### GABARDITO - UPPER HECHO VALLEY

WEATHER: wall to wall sunshine, nice afternoon breeze, top temp 35C

Our pre-breakfast walk from the hotel was both enjoyable and productive, the weather was just dandy, clear sky, no wind but a little chilly. We set off down the driveway towards the river Subordan, both Blackcap and Garden Warbler were singing, it was good to point out the differences of these two very similar songs.

Also in the garden we saw Chaffinch, Eurasian Treecreeper, European Robin and we could hear Song Thrush – it made us think that we were home in the UK!

We bumped into a tit-flock that were feeding in the pines along the lane, we saw Crested Tit, Blue Tit and Great Tit. At the river we found Grey Wagtail and some of the group saw White-throated Dipper. A low flying Egyptian Vulture came over as we walked back up the hill, we then found both Red-backed Shrike and Cirl Bunting sitting on a telephone wire.

Back in the hotel grounds we saw a second Red-backed Shrike, two Brown Hares and we had great views of a Firecrest. High up on the mountains the Griffon Vultures were beginning to stir and one or two unidentified 'chough' drifted around.

visit Α to the well-known Wallcreeper site at the Refugio de Garbadito filled the rest of the morning, we had a great time up there. A narrow, winding lane leads you to a car park next to the Refugio, we noted Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Robin, Blackcap and Serin on the way up. In the open alpine meadow at the Refugio we found at least three Citril Finches, also Serins and a family party of Black Redstarts. Butterflies were now on the wing, we saw plenty of Black-veined Whites, Southern Speckled Wood, Wood White and Mountain Clouded Yellow.



We spent almost an hour walking the short distance to the famous Wallcreeper rock-face noting several bird species along the way such as Eurasian Nuthatch, Eurasian Treecreeper, Dunnock, Garden Warbler, Black Woodpecker (heard) and lots of common birds. We also found dozens of Burnt-tip Orchids and we also saw the tiny Duke of Burgundy Fritillary.

We made ourselves comfortable at the Wallcreeper site and whilst we waited we were entertained by the dozens of Crag Martins, House Martins, Alpine Swifts, Red-billed Choughs and Griffon Vultures all filling the sky above us. On the rock-face we noted Black Redstart and after about an hour's wait we finally found a Wallcreeper, fantastic.

Over the next 30 minutes we saw the bird a few more times but it did not give prolonged views and some of the group did not get a satisfactory and positive sighting. The bird never showed again! We did see Bonelli's Warbler, Black Redstart, Wren, Alpine Chough, Common Kestrel and we heard Green Woodpecker many times and Common Crossbill called.

On the way back to the Refugio we added Coal Tit and we had superb views of a LAMMERGEIER, luckily for us we picked the bird up when it was distant and we watched it drift right over the top of us, it never moved a muscle as it drifted effortlessly over, a fantastic sighting.

Back at the car park we found a couple of picnic tables where we ate out lunch, what a lovely setting, the scenery is just outstanding with many birds, flowers and butterflies thrown it.

For the remainder of the afternoon we drove through the very scenic Foz de Binies (gorge) and made our way towards the border with France up the Hecho Valley. A series of short walks and birding stops produced several nice sightings of Yellowhammer, Grey Wagtail, White Wagtail, Red-backed Shrike, Egyptian Vulture and Red Kite.

We drove as far we could and parked up, outstanding scenery surrounded us, small patches of snow lay in the shadows but not very much. We saw Chamois, several Orchid species, lots of butterflies and we had good close views of Egyptian Vultures. A 'raptor-watch' produced Griffon Vulture, Red Kite, Booted Eagle, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and two GOLDEN EAGLES, wow! I love watching these majestic beasts, one of the eagles put on a display making a series of dives and climbs, just fantastic.

We made a couple of short stops along the river on the way back looking for Dipper without success and returned to the hotel by 5pm for some R & R before dinner at 8pm.

### DAY 4 – THURSDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017

### RIO ARAGON NEAR FUENTE DEL REINE – SANTA CILIA AIRFIELD - CITADEL DE JACA – CANDANCHU & ASTUN SKI RESORTS

WEATHER: hot and sunny, hazy sunshine at times. Top temp 32C

Our early morning walk found us at the tunnel on the approach road to the hotel at 7am but not before enjoying some great views of Crested Tit in the hotel garden. We also saw Blackcap and Yellowhammer and we could hear Robin, Garden Warbler and a distant Song Thrush, one or two of the group heard Tawny Owl during the night.



At the tunnel, we watched several pairs of Crag Martins, they had built their nests in the tunnel we counted 8 nests. A flock of Long-tailed Tits were new for our list, we scoped a Grey Heron in the river far below us and the obligatory low-level Egyptian Vulture drifted past.

For our birding today we first drove down the valley to the lowlands to visit a few areas around the River Aragon hoping for sightings of a couple of warblers missing from our list. A small areas of oak trees on the Alastuey road was our first destination.

A Eurasian Hoopoe was spotted as we pulled up in the bus, it fed on ground not far away and remained in view as we all got out of the bus, we found a Woodlark also on the ground in the same area. After a short walk we found our first warbler of the day, it was a Subalpine Warbler and it showed intermittently as it sang from various bushes. We also had superb views of a Firecrest this little gem showed very well and at close quarters, what a little beauty.



Alpine Accentor

Not far along the main highway to Jaca we turned off on a small track and arrived at a bridge over the River Aragon, a short walk was disappointing, the area seemed very quiet and bereft of birds. A single Common Sandpiper was seen on rocks in the river, we also saw a couple of Serins and we heard Common Nightingale, Blackcap and a distant Turtle Dove. As we got back into the bus a Great-spotted Woodpecker flew across the river, but only I saw it!

At Santa Cilia aerodrome we searched for Tawny Pipit and in doing so we found Melodious Warbler, Crested Lark, Skylark and a good number of raptors. The airfield sits on a plateau which is obviously good for thermals (there is a gliding club found there) so many raptors gather there, we saw both Red & Black Kites, Common Buzzard, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, the latter was carrying a snake, also Griffon and Egyptian Vultures. We did find a Tawny Pipit and we also found a number of butterflies one of which, the Spanish Purple Hairstreak, was new for me!

Next we drove into the centre of Jaca to the citadel, an ancient monument surrounded by parkland where both Rock and Tree Sparrows breed in good numbers. We saw both species during our short visit as well as good numbers of Common Swifts, also Black Redstart, Red Kite and plenty of Blackbirds.

We stopped to eat our lunch as we drove up towards Candanchu, we parked in a picnic area next to the river. A Garden Warbler showed well as we ate, we also watched Common Nightingale, White Wagtail and Common Chaffinch. A little further up the road we stopped for coffee at a café next to the river where we saw lots of Grey Wagtails and Bobby (Long-Lens) Longhorn saw a Dipper.

At Candanchu we took in the magnificent scenery as we walked into the main skiing arena, a huge grass-covered valley stretched out in front of us whilst strings of chair lifts lay lifeless like avenues of stricken trees, frozen in situ. We heard Common Quail calling from all directions, near and far, the grass was barely 10cms long and yet eight pairs of eyes could not see a single Quail, it was

amazing, we walked to where they called from and they simply moved away and began calling again without showing a feather!

Despite not seeing the Quails we enjoyed our visit there, large groups Alpine Choughs and some Red-billed Choughs entertained us as did Northern Wheatear, Black Redstart, Yellowhammers and an Alpine Marmot. We couldn't find a Common Rock Thrush, but a Blue Rock Thrush appeared briefly, we had a great time watching Water Pipits, Linnets, family parties of Northern Wheatears and lots of the ever-present Alpine Chough, a new species for most of the group.



Ring Ouzel

After a brief excursion over the border into France, where we added Common Chaffinch, Griffon Vulture and Blackcap to our French-list, we drove to another Ski Resort called Astun. We spent an hour or so searching the river and the ski-slopes for Dipper and Rock Thrush.

Five of the group went off for a walk whilst I stayed with the other two group members at the bus. We found Dippers, a family party, the others spent a lot of time watching Water Pipits! We met up again at the far end of the skiing village where we all enjoyed scope views of a pair of Common Rock Thrushes at last!

It took just over an hour to drive back to the hotel where a nice cold beer was enjoyed before a lovely evening meal. Our bird-log was called before we ate, we now have around 120 species on the list.

### DAY 5 – FRIDAY JUNE 16<sup>TH</sup> 2017

### ANSÓ VALLEY – ZURITA – LINZA REFUGIO – RONÇAL VALLEY – REFUGIO BELAGUA – COL DE LA PIERRE SAINT-MARTIN (1750 meters)

WEATHER: All day sunshine with a nice cooling breeze. Temperature in lower 20's, just perfect.

We spent a fabulous day in the high Pyrenees visiting some of the most stunning scenery in the area, it really was breath-taking in places and the weather was excellent too.

After leaving our hotel just after 8am we made our way down through Hecho Village and then we turned onto the Ansó road. Our first stop was on a high ridge that gave superb panoramic views over large areas of forest. The air was still, many butterflies were already on the wing, we noted Large Wall Brown, Marbled White, Cleopatra and dozens of Small Whites. A Common Cuckoo called in the distance and that was all we had bird-wise!

In the Ansó valley we followed the road up through Ansó Village and headed for the Zurita campsite following the river up through some outstanding scenery and a narrow gorge. After 12km the gorge opens out to one of my favourite places which is where we made our first official birding-stop. Our position on the side of the road gave up outstanding views of the forest and the River Veral winds its way down the valley far below us. We immediately found Grey Wagtail and Dipper, also Black Redstart, Serin, Yellowhammer, Mistle Thrush, Linnet and a few very distant Griffon Vultures and Chough species.

We walked up to the camp-site but only found common English Garden-birds, such as Song Thrush, European Robin, Chaffinch and Blackbirds. We continued along the road to the Refugio at Linza where I was forced to stop for coffee! Crag Martins flew very close to us and we noted Black Redstarts and Serin.



Our journey continued as we made our way back down to Zurita where turned onto the connecting road that leads to Isaba in the Ronçal Valley. We made a couple of stops along this road to search for Black Woodpecker, all we got was Carrion Crows and Ravens.

Belagua Beech woods was a nice place to stop for a stroll in the dense woodland, this area needs some serious management, the trees are too densely packed and grow very tall and thin. We saw nothing in the woodland except Chaffinch and Eurasian Jay, several pairs of Griffon Vultures entertained us up a high rock-face as we viewed from the car park.

The road climbs steeply up to the Belagua Pass and the French Border, it was a little windy up there but we were above any clouds. Cloud cover is always a concern up there and can be devastating for bird-watching. We parked just on the border and scanned the surrounding tree-less hills for birds, it looked as though a fire had swept through the area in the recent past, the landscape was littered with burnt saplings and no scrub, we saw Linnet and Dunnock.

A couple of Citril Finches sat on the new restaurant building at the border but flew off before we could scope them and Alpine Choughs seemed to be everywhere. We drove further along the winding road where the landscape changed to dramatic limestone cols dotted with pine trees, short grass and low scrub, the whole area was covered in an array of colourful flowers, it really was beautiful.

We made an abrupt stop when an Alpine Accentor flew up from the road-side, we had brief but good views of it as it sat on top of a pine tree before disappearing, wow that is a top bird. More Citril Finches joined Linnets, Goldfinches and even Alpine Choughs feeding along the grass verge.

After walking for a while we stopped in an open area next to some disused buildings to eat our lunch which was punctuated with bird sightings. We watched Black Redstarts, Northern Wheatears, Citril Finches, Mistle Thrushes and the ever-present Griffon Vultures, Alpine Choughs and Crag Martins.

Next, we walked down into a hidden valley where I have seen Ring Ouzel on previous visits and today was no exception. We had excellent views of a male as it searched for food in the grass, a fantastic sighting.

We decided to return to the site where we saw the Alpine Accentor, this time we had even better views, we actually found the nest site where a pair of birds where feeding young. We had outstanding views of them as the nest site was on the side of the road! Furthermore, a Ring Ouzel was also seen several times as it flew back and forth over the top of us, it was also visiting a nest!

During our vigil at the Accentor site we had great close views of Alpine Chough and more Citril Finches, it was very hard to drag ourselves away.



**Butterfly Orchid** 

The return journey involved fewer stops but at Zurita we put in some time watching raptors over a nearby ridge. We saw Griffon Vultures, Egyptian Vultures, Common Buzzards and a displaying Peregrine Falcon.

We arrived back at the hotel around 6pm and ate a superb dinner at 8, but our birding wasn't over just yet! At 9:30pm we jumped back into the bus and drove for 30 minutes down the valley to a well-known site for Eagle Owls. The weather was perfect, a clear sky, not wind and a nice warm temperature. We heard European Nightjar as it got dark, one person saw one in flight, then an Eagle appeared, we could hardly see it but it was a Short-toed Eagle carrying a large snake, what fantastic eyesight this bird must have.

Another raptor perched on a tree on the ridge, we only saw a silhouette of it but we could see it was a Buzzard, most probably a Honey Buzzard. Then an Eagle Owl appeared, without calling, it flew

across the valley with the fading light behind it, smashing. To finish off our evening watch a Scop's Owl started calling behind us.

On the drive back we saw what was most probably a Wild Cat, it walked across the road as we approached the hotel at 11:15pm.....good night!

### DAY 6 – SATURDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017

### ARRÉS ROAD – MONESTERIO SAN JUAN DE LA PEÑA - RIO GALLEGO – EMBALSE DE LA SOTOÑERO MALLOS DE RIGLOS

WEATHER: very hot and sunny all day, light winds. Top temp 36C

We spent all day visiting just 3 sites but it was so hot in the afternoon that we achieved very little, walking in the heat was impossible and consequently we saw fewer birds than on previous days this week.



The 'Fingers' of Riglos

It was around 9am and 27C when we arrived at our first destination, the road to Arrés. This area is well known for its breeding Ortolan Buntings, it has a north facing escarpment covered in low scrub on one side of the road and wide, open cereal fields leading down to the River Aragón on the other.

Corn Buntings were sitting on bushes and wires, I'm sure that they were only there to torment me, but we sifted through them and eventually found our prize, the Ortolan Bunting. We also saw Common Stonechat, Red-backed Shrike, Turtle Dove (heard), Serin and Chaffinch. A second stop near a bridge produced sightings of Cirl Bunting, Common Whitethroat, Eurasian Chiffchaff, Bonelli's Warbler and several Black Kites.

Our drive up to the Monastery took us through picturesque landscapes and a climb through woodland where miradors gave us fantastic views of the surrounding area. From the car park at the 'new' Monastery we walked through mature pine woodland looking for the elusive Black Woodpecker. We found the woodland very productive despite there being a lot of tourists around, Eurasian Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Goldcrest, Jay and lots of common birds were present.

From the mirador or Balcón de Pireneo we had superb views of the Pyrenees stretching out in front of us. Then we had a sighting of our most wanted bird. First we heard it drumming, then it called a couple of times and eventually we had three or four sightings of it in flight, Nigel saw it perched and managed photograph it. Finally, we had our Black Woodpecker!

Following that excitement, we drove all the way down the Gallego Valley heading towards Huesca stopping for lunch at the valley bottom near a large reed-bed. It was very hot by this time with very little breeze. We saw a Common Nightingale and not much else. We moved on after eating our picnic passing even more picturesque landscapes as we passed Riglos and its famous 'fingers' of pudding-stone.

At the huge Embalse (reservoir) at Sotoñero we spent a couple of hours stopping in various locations around the shoreline, including the dam, to look for more species, but the heat was too much! As a result we had travelled quite a distance for very little. Grey & Purple Herons, Great, Little and Cattle Egrets, Mallard, Great Crested Grebe, Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Little Ringed Plover was the total of the water birds seen. A few passerine sightings included Great Reed Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Woodlark, Golden Oriole, Serins and lots of common finches. Birds of prey were practically absent, a single Black Kite and a Common Buzzard.

It was now 4:30pm and 36C we jumped into the bus and set off for the hotel, we made a couple of stops for coffee and ice-cream and to photograph the Mallos de Riglos. We arrived back at the hotel at 6:30pm in readiness for dinner.

### **DAY 7 – SUNDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017**

## TRANSFER FROM THE PYRENEES TO THE PICOS DE EUROPA – WITH STOPS AT THE EMBALSE DE EBRO AND SAINT VINCENTE DE BARQUERA

WEATHER: All day sunshine, top temp 31C

We were up, breakfasted, packed and on our way by 8:15am we had a journey of some 450 kms ahead of us and we intended to spend all day doing it!



A Dark Green Fritillary

We made several stops for fuel, coffee, lunch and birding, our bird list was small but we did add several new species to the list.

Both Black and Red Kites were seen regularly along with Griffon Vultures and we saw a pair of Montagu's Harrier. Our route took us passed Pamplona, Logroño and Santander it was mostly on good autovia roads but a large section was on slower roads where we could stop more or less at will.

Our lunch stop was made at a picnic site some 50km north of Logroño, we noted Eurasian Hoopoe, Melodious Warbler, Common Nightingale and a Booted Eagle. A couple of new butterflies went on our list too, Painted Lady and Spanish Gatekeeper.

The next stop was another 100km further north where we watched, Egyptian Vulture, Raven, Carrion Crow, Griffon Vultures and a little lower down we saw Common Stonechat, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Bonelli's Warbler and we heard a Common Cuckoo.

One of our main stops was along the shoreline of the huge Embalse de Ebro, the water level was very lower and as it was a Sunday many people were enjoying various bird-disturbing activities. A very low-flying Honey Buzzard came right over heads whilst we were watching Common Whitethroat, what a treat that was. We also saw Great-crested and Black-necked Grebes, Mallard, Yellow-legged Gulls and a surprising Egyptian Goose! Several Terns were seen in the distance and they looked like and fed like Black Terns but could have been Whiskered so I never put them on the list.

Our last stop was at the large estuary and mudflats at St Vincente de Barquera, what a picturesque sea-side town. It was packed with day trippers of course, but we managed to park on the bridge and scope the area.



The mud-flats at St. Vincente

A gull and tern roost held; Yellow-legged, Black-headed & Lesser Black-backed Gulls, with a few Sandwich Terns and out on the mudflats we saw both Eurasian Curlew and Whimbrels along with a lone Great Cormorant, it was a little disappointing as far as bird numbers was concerned.

It took an hour to drive to our hotel in Cosgaya from St Vincente, the drive took us through a beautiful gorge some 15kms long the views were spectacular but the driving was arduous. We arrived at the hotel around 5:45pm, after a long day on the road! A Dipper and White Wagtails were in the river right next to the hotel, what a nice welcome.

Dinner was delicious, a cold beer went down well too, tomorrow is our last birding day and we are due to take the cable car up to the peaks of the Picos.

### **DAY 8 – MONDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017**

#### FUENTE DÉ - PEMBES - RIO DEVA

WEATHER: Beautiful sunny morning, thunderstorms later with lengthy periods of hail & rain. Temp 23C

We had a fabulous morning with the best weather I have ever had in the Picos, however, the afternoon was a complete wash out!

We took an early breakfast and headed for the cable car (teleférico) at Fuente Dé just a few kilometers away. Some of the group had walked across the road to the river and watched Grey Wagtail, Dipper and several other species before breakfast.

We arrived at the cable car at 9am and had to wait an hour for the first ride of the day, during our wait we watched Red-billed Chough, Red Kite, Eurasian Nuthatch, Coal Tit and we had superb views of a Firecrest.

The Teleferico carries you up over 800 meters in less than 4 minutes, you really are up in the peaks when you step out of the car. As soon as we emerged from the upper-restaurant building we started listing birds, a Black Redstart was first then we had very brief views of Alpine Accentor.

The scenery up there is breath-taking, it was hot and sunny with barely a cooling breeze, too hot perhaps for the birds! Bird song and movement was minimal, we heard one Black Redstart and one Water Pipit in song and sightings were few and far between. Alpine Choughs seemed to be ever present and one or two more Alpine Accentors put in an appearance, we also saw Northern Wheatear and Eurasian Linnet. Before long we had our first sighting of a Snowfinch, it was a male collecting food some 60 meters below us, but it flew off before everyone had scope views.



Alpine Accentor - Nigel Bleaken

At the main col about 1km from the cable car we began seeing several Snowfinches displaying high above us around the rock face, they looked like black and white butterflies tumbling down out of the sky, it was fascinating to watch them. Alpine Chough landed very close to us but all this time we were scanning the rock faces for Wallcreeper without a sighting, it was a good job that we saw this little gem back in the Pyrenees!

Much closer views were had of Alpine Accentor and whilst we were having lunch back at the cable car restaurant a cheeky Accentor landed at our feet and began picking up crumbs.

There wasn't a hint of a thunderstorm as we boarded the cable car to descend, but when we emerged at ground level a few minutes later spots of rain fell. By the time we reached Pembes which is a few kilometers back down the valley it had clouded over and thunder and lightning had begun. We chanced our luck and began a walk up through the village, noting Spotted Flycatcher, White Wagtail and three of us saw a Common Redstart before it started to rain heavily.

What followed was a prolonged, torrential rain-storm with hail stones thrown in, how could that be when the air temperature was around 28C? We got a soaking and managed to get back to the bus when it eased off a little. The rain then became heavier and unrelenting so we jumped back into the bus and drove straight back to the hotel.



By about 5pm the rain stopped but it was too late for any further birding excursions, one or two of the group ventured out and watched Dipper on the river and Common Redstart in the garden of the house next door.

We all dried out by dinner time and another lovely meal was enjoyed by all.

### DAY 9 - TUESDAY 20th JUNE 2017

#### TRANSFER FROM COSGAYA TO MADRID AIRPORT

#### WEATHER: Sunny with broken sunshine. Temp 25C

A last bit of birding around the hotel grounds and across the road to the Rio Deva was where most of the group were found before our 8am breakfast. We watched Common Redstarts feeding young in a nest, in a hole, in a tree, in the garden next door. We saw Grey Wagtail and Dipper on the river.

Our long journey to Madrid began at 9am we took the scenic route and avoided the coastal autovia which would have taken us passed Santander. Instead we chose a slower route but the mountainous landscape was much more beautiful and it allowed us to stop where we liked.

We had some great views of Montagu's Harrier as well as plenty of Common Buzzards and both Black and Red Kites. Shrikes, Stonechats, Jays, White Storks and Magpies all went on the list. A couple of stops for coffee and a longer stop for lunch saw us arrive at Madrid around 2pm.

The tour was over, everyone bailed out of the bus and set off to find their check-in desks, Nigel and I had to return the hire vehicles before departing, however, we did have several hours to wait and we used that time to go birding in a park some 20 minutes from the airport.

El Pardo is a huge country park on the Northern outskirts of Madrid and consists of Stone Pine woodland, open grassland, lakes, ponds, streams and a prison, a town (El Pardo) and lots of restaurants, I can imagine how busy this park would be during the weekend!

Nigel and I parked the car near a series of ponds with reed-beds and pine woods all around us. We had an amazing time over next 2-3 hours listing a lot of birds. One of the first birds we saw was Crested Tit, then we heard Moorhen call several times before one actually showed. We saw Reed Warbler, Mallard, Black Kite then a Little Bittern flew past us, wow, never expected that.



Common Redstart - Bob Longhorn

The habitat looked just right for Penduline Tit and after searching for a while we came across a family party of them, at least three juveniles showed well on our side of the ponds. Serins, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Short-toed Treecreeper showed well before we spotted an eagle soaring high up. The bird quickly 'fell' out of the sky as it dived down behind the tree cover, I was convinced it was a Spanish Imperial Eagle whilst Nigel hardly got a look at it and couldn't form an opinion, which is very unusual for him!

We dashed off to where the eagle had gone but we never located it, a pity. What we did find was Great Spotted Woodpecker and more Short-toed Treecreepers. We stopped near a road-bridge which produced Blackcap, Cetti's Warbler and a few Tree Sparrows. Soon it was time for us to leave, so we drove the car back to the rental company at 6pm and headed off to airport. The trip was now finally over!

### SPECIES RECORDED 12<sup>TH</sup> – 20<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017

					D	ATE	SEE	EN			
	SPECIES		12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	Egyptian Goose	Alopochen aegyptiaca							X		
2	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus						X	X		
3	Black-necked Grebe	Podiceps nigricollis							X		
4	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo							X		
5	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta		X	X			X	X		
6	Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	X	X				X			
7	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea		X	X			X	X		
8	Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea		X				X			
9	Little Bittern	Ixobrychus minutes									X
10	White Stork	Ciconia ciconia	X	X				X	X		X

11	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos		X				X	X		
12	Lammergeier	Gypaetus barbatus			X						
13	Egyptian Vulture	Neophron percnopterus		X	X	X	X	X	X		
14	Eurasian Griffon Vulture	Gyps fulvus	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
15	Honey Buzzard	Pernis apivorus					X		X		
16	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
17	Black Kite	Milvus migrans	X	X		X		X	X		X
18	Red Kite	Milvus milvus		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
19	Booted Eagle	Aquila pennatus	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
20	Golden Eagle	Aquila chrysaetos			X						
21	Short-toed Snake-Eagle	Circaetus gallicus		X		X	X				X
22	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus			X		X				
23	Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus		X							X
24	Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus		X					X		X
25	Lesser Kestrel	Falco naumanni		X							
26	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus		X	X	X	X	X	X		
27	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus					X				
28	Common Quail	Coturnix coturnix				Н					
29	Red-legged Partridge	Alectoris rufa	X								
30	Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	11								X
31	Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra						X			
32		Himantopus himantopus		X				21			
	Black-winged Stilt Stone Curlew	Burhinus oedicnemus		X							
33		Charadrius dubius		X				X			
34	Little Ringed Plover	Actitis hypoleucos		Λ		X		Λ			
35	Common Sandpiper	Numenius arquata				Λ			X		
36	Eurasian Curlew	Numenius phaeopus							X		
37	Whimbrel Wallace In a set Call	Larus michahellis						X	X		
38	Yellow-legged Gull	Larus fuscus						X	X		
39	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus ridibundus						Λ	X		
40	Black-headed Gull	Thalasseus sandvicensis							X		
41	Sandwich Tern	Pterocles alchata		X					Λ		
42	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	Pterocles orientalis		X							
43	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	Columba livia	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
44	Rock Dove /Feral Pigeon	Streptopelia turtur				Λ	Λ		Λ		Λ
45	Turtle Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	X	X				Н	37	37	37
46	Eurasian Collared Dove	Columba palumbus	X	X	**			X	X	X	X
47	Common Woodpigeon	Cuculus canorus	X	X	Н		37	X	**		X
48	Common Cuckoo			Н			X		Н		
49	Eagle Owl	Bubo bubo				77	X				
50	Tawny Owl	Strix aluco				X					
51	Scop's Owl	Otus scops					Н				
52	European Nightjar	Caprimulgus europaeus					X				
53	Alpine Swift	Apus melba		<u> </u>	X	<u> </u>	<u> </u>		<u> </u>		
54	Common Swift	Apus apus	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
55	Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis		X							
56	European Bee-eater	Merops apiaster		X				X			X
57	Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops	X	X		X		X	X		
58	Green Woodpecker	Picus viridus			Н						
59	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopus major				X					X
60	Black Woodpecker	Drycopus martius						X			
61	Wryneck	Jynx torquatta		X							

62	Skylark	Alauda arvensis		X		X					
63	Calandra Lark	Melanocorypha calandra	X	X							
64	Wood Lark	Lullula arborea				X					
65	Crested Lark	Galerida cristata	X	X		X		X			X
66	Thekla Lark	Galerida theklae		X				X			
67	Greater Short-toed Lark	Calandrella brachydactyla		X							
68	Lesser Short-toed Lark	Calandrella rufescens		X							
69	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia		X					X		
70	Eurasian Crag Martin	Hirundo rupestris			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
71	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
72	House Martin	Delichon urbica	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
73		Anthus campestris	74	71	71	X	21	71	71	71	71
	Tawny Pipit	Anthus spinoletta				X	X			X	
74	Water Pipit	Motacilla alba		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
75	White Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea		Λ	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
76	Grey Wagtail	Cinclus cinclus			X	X	X	Λ	X	X	X
77	White Throated Dipper	Prunella modularis				Λ	X		Λ	Λ	Λ
78	Dunnock	Prunella moaularis  Prunella collaris			X	<u> </u>		1	<u> </u>	37	
79	Alpine Accentor		37		37	37	X	37		X	
80	European Robin	Erithacus rubecula	X	**	X	X	X	X	**	X	7.7
81	Common Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos	H	X		X	Н	X	Н		Н
82	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
83	Common Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus								X	X
84	European Stonechat	Saxicola rubicola	X					X	X	X	X
85	Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe				X	X			X	
86	Black-eared Wheatear	Oenanthe hispanica	X	X							
87	Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos			X		X			Н	
88	Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus			X		X				
89	Eurasian Blackbird	Turdus merula	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
90	Ring Ouzel	Turdus torquatus					X				
91	Blue Rock-Thrush	Monticola solitarius	X			X					
92	Rock Thrush	Monticola saxatilis				X					
93	Garden Warbler	Sylvia borin			X	X	Н	Н	Н		
94	Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	Н	Н	X	X	Н	Н	Н	Н	X
95	Common Whitethroat	Sylvia communis						X	X		
96	Western Orphean Warbler	Sylvia hortensis		X		Н		Н			
97	Sardinian Warbler	Sylvia melanocephala				X					
98	Subalpine Warbler	Sylvia cantillans				X		X			
99	Spectacled Warbler	Sylvia conspicillata		X							
100	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis	X					X			
101	Cetti's Warbler	Cettia cetti		Н				Н			X
102	Great Reed-Warbler	Acrocephalus arundinaceus		X				X			
103	Eurasian Reed-Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus		X							X
104	Melodious Warbler	Hippolais polyglotta				X			X		
105	Western Bonelli's Warbler	Phylloscopus bonelli	X		X			X	X		
106	Eurasian chiffchaff	Phylloscopus colybita				Н		X			
107	Goldcrest	Regulus regulus						X			
108	Firecrest	Regulus ignicapillus			X	X				X	
109	Wren	Troglodytes trogladytes			X	Н		Н		X	
110	Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata		X	<del></del>	<del></del>		<del></del>		X	
111	Great Tit	Parus major		X	X	X	X	X	X		
111	Coal Tit	Parus ater		1	X	<del> </del>	X	X	<del></del>		X
112	Coai III					<u> </u>	**	- *	<u> </u>	l	

113	Eurasian Blue Tit	Parus caeruleus		X	X	X	X	X	X		
114	Crested Tit	Parus cristatus			X	X		X			X
115	Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus				X					
116	Eurasian Penduline-Tit	Remiz pendulinus									X
117	Wallcreeper	Tichodroma muraria			X						
118	Eurasian Nuthatch	Sitta europaea			X	Н		X		X	
119	Eurasian Treecreeper	Certhia familiaris			X	X		X	X		
120	Short-toed Treecreeper	Certhia brachydactyla									X
121	Iberian Grey Shrike	Lanius meridionalis		X							X
122	Red-backed Shrike	Lanius collurio			X	X		X			
123	Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator		X		X		X			X
124	Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica	X	X		X		X	X	X	
125	Eurasian Jay	Garrulus glandarius			X		X	X		X	
126	Eurasian Jackdaw	Corvus monedula									X
127	Red-billed Chough	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax			X	X				X	
128	Alpine Chough	Pyrrhocorax graculus			X	X	X			X	
129	Carrion Crow	Corvus corone		X		X	X		X	X	X
130	Common or Northern Raven	Corvus corax		X			X		X	X	
131	Spotless Starling	Sturnus unicolor	X	X		X		X			X
132	Eurasian Golden-Oriole	Oriolus oriolus	Н	X				X			
133	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
134	Eurasian Tree-Sparrow	Passer montanus				X					X
135	Rock Sparrow	Petronia petronia				X		X			
136	Snowfinch (White-winged)	Montifringilla nivalis								X	
137	Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
138	Eurasian Linnet	Carduelis cannabina	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
139	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
140	European Greenfinch	Carduelis chloris	X	X				X	X		X
141	Citril Finch	Carduelis citrinella			X		X				
142	European Serin	Serinus serinus	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
143	Bullfinch	Pyrrhula pyrrhula			X	X	Н			X	
144	Common Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra		X	Н						
145	Ortolan Bunting	Emberiza hortulana						X			
146	Yellowhammer	Emberiza citrinella			X	X	X				
147	Cirl Bunting	Emberiza cirlus		X	X	X		X			X
148	Corn Bunting	Miliaria calandra	X	X		X		X	X		
149	Monk Parakeet	Myiopsitta monachrus	X								

		BUTTERFLIE	S								
	SPECIES										
	<u>PAPILIONIDAE</u>			12	13	14	TE 16	17	18	19	20
1	Swallowtail	Papilio machaon				X	X				
2	Apollo	Parnassius apollo								X	
	PI	<u>TERIDAE</u>									
3	Black-veined white	Aporia crataegi				X	X				
4	Large white	Pieris brassica				X	X				

_	Small white	Antogoia nango		X				X				
5	Bath white	Artogeia rapae		X				1				$\vdash$
6		Pontia daplidice		<b>A</b>				X				
7	Mountain dappled white	Euchloe simplonia				X		X				<u> </u>
8	Mountain clouded yellow	Colias phicomone				X		Λ				
9	Pale clouded yellow	Colias palaeno		V	v			v			-	<u> </u>
10	Clouded yellow	Colias crocea		X	X	X		X			-	
11	Brimstone	Gonepteryx rhamni		X		X		***			-	
12	Cleopatra	Gonepteryx cleopatra				X		X				ļ
13	Wood white	Leptidea sinapis				X						
	LYCAE	<u>ENIDAE</u>										
14	Ilex hairstreak	Satyrium ilicis				X						
15	Spanish Purple Hairstreak						X					
16	Holly blue	Cetastrina argiolus					X					
17	Brown argus	Aricia agestis		X		X						
18	Common blue	Polyommatus icarus		X		X						
	RIODI	NIDAE										
	_			ı	1	1		ı	ı	1		
19	Duke of Burgundy	<u>Hamearis lucina</u>			ļ	X						
	<u>NYMPH</u>	ALIDAE		12	13	14		TE 16	17	18	19	20
20	Camberwell Beauty						X					
21	Southern white admiral	Liminitis reducta				X						
22	Red admiral	Vanessa atalanta						X				
23	Small tortoiseshell	Aglais urticae					X	X				
24	Dark green fritillary	Mesoacidalia aglaja						X				
25	Queen of Spain fritillary	Issoria lathonia						X				
	` '	RIDAE		ļ			ļ	ļ	ļ	-		
26	Marbled white	Melanargia galathea						X				
27	Spanish Marbled White	Melanargia ines							X			
28	Piedmont ringlet	Erebia meolans									X	
29	Meadow brown	Maniola jurtina		X		X		X				
30	Spanish gatekeeper	Pyronia bathseba									X	
31	Speckled wood	Pararge aegeria		X		X						
32	Large wall brown	Lasiommata maera						X	X		X	
	HESPE	<u>RIIDAE</u>					DA	TE				
				12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
33	Grizzled skipper	<u>Pyrgus malvae</u>					X					
34	Dingy skipper	Erynnis tages									X	
35	Small skipper	Thymelicus sylvestris							X			
	OTHER LEPIDOPTER	A/MAMMALS/REPTIL	FS/	<b>A N</b> /I	PН	TRI		C/T	NCI	7 <b>С</b> Ч	<b>P</b> S	

SPECI	hread Lacewing  Nemoptera bipennis  yrenean Chamois  Ruicapra rupicapra					DA	TE				
_			12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Hummingbird Hawk Moth	Macroglossum stellatarum				X			X	X		
Thread Lacewing	Nemoptera bipennis			X							
Pyrenean Chamois	Ruicapra rupicapra				X						
Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus			X							
European Brown Hare	Lepus europaeus				X		X				
Alpine Marmot	Marmota marmota					X	X				

Red Fox	Vulpes vulpes		X		X			
Common Pipestrelle	Pipistrellus pipistrellus					X		
Red Deer	Cervus elaphus				X			
Pyrenean Frog	Rana pyrenaica				X			