

WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

Bird – Watching Holiday

To

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

JUNE 20th – JUNE 28th 2015



TRIP REPORT

Places Visited

SATURDAY 20TH

**MADRID AIRPORT – BARAJAS – ALMUNIA –
VILLANUEVA DE HUERVA - FUENDETODOS**

SUNDAY 21ST

**EL PLANERON – QUINTO DE EBRO – LOS
MONEGROS – JACA – HECHO VALLEY**

MONDAY 22ND

**REFUGIO DE GABARDITO – UPPER HECHO
VALLEY**

TUESDAY 23RD

**RIO ARAGON – SANTA CILLIA AIRFIELD – ROAD
TO ARRAS**

WEDNESDAY 24TH

**MONESTERIO SAN JUAN DE LA PEÑA – RIO
GALLEGO – EMBALSE SOTONERA – RIGLOS – SANTA CRUZ**

THURSDAY 25TH

**HECHO TO ANSO TO RONCAL VALLEY –
BELAGUA FRONTIER PASS – PIERRE DE SAN MARTIN –
ASTUN – HECHO VIA JACA**

FRIDAY 26TH

**TRANSFER TO THE PICOS VIA PAMPLONA –
LOGROÑO – EMBALSE DE EBRO – POTES**

SATURDAY 27TH

FUENTE DÉ CABLE CAR TO THE PEAKS – PEMBES

SUNDAY 28TH

**TRANSFER FROM PICOS DE EUROPA TO MADRID
WITH STOPS AT FUENTE DÉ AND SAN VICENTE DE LA
BARQUERA**

LEADER: BOB BUCKLER

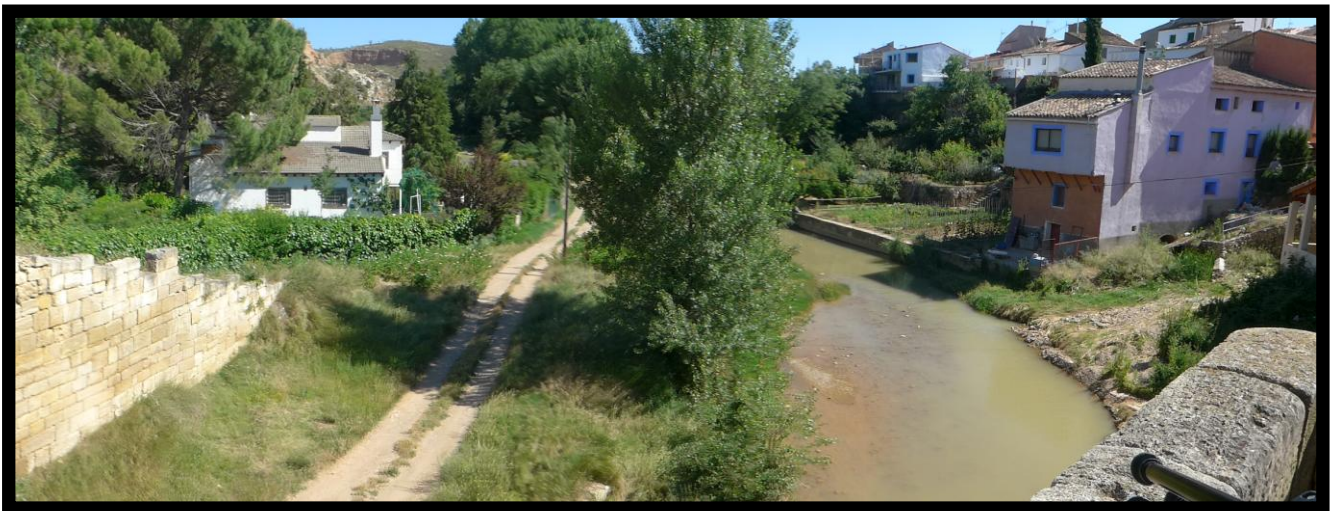
DAY 1 – SATURDAY 20TH JUNE 2015

MADRID TO ZARAGOZA PLAINS with stops at:

ALMUNIA – VILLANUEVA DE HERVA - FUENDETODOS

I arrived in Madrid last night by road and stayed overnight near the airport, so I was nice and fresh and raring to go when I collected Mike from Terminal 2 at Barajas Airport at 11am. Unfortunately David and Catriona were arriving at Terminal 4, located at the other side of the airport some 30 minutes' drive away. Luckily we had a couple of hours in which to do it.

To kill some time Mike and I sat in the main square at Barajas drinking a nice cup of coffee, the weather was glorious if not a little too hot. We watched a family party of White Storks on the nest, the 3 chicks were regularly exercising their wings in readiness for fledging. Plenty of Common and Pallid Swifts were zooming around and we saw several Monk Parakeets.



David and Catriona arrived on time and by 1:30pm we were on our way to Zaragoza a 3 hour drive along the autovia. We stopped for a bite to eat along the autovia and again when we turned off at Almunia. We saw Griffon Vulture, Booted Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Common Magpie, Wood Pigeon and Cattle Egret during the first part of the journey. At Almunia we stopped to watch an Egyptian Vulture, also Common Kestrel and Turtle Dove.

Our next stop was at a village called Villanueva de Huerva where we spent an hour walking near the river and some small cultivated fields. Our best sightings included: Wryneck, Golden Oriole, Blue Rock Thrush, Zitting Cisticola, Griffon Vulture and lots of Serins, we also saw Long-tailed Tit, Common Swift, White Wagtail and a second stop just further along the road produced Black-eared Wheatear, Corn Bunting and lots of Eurasian Linnets.

A very last stop just outside Fuentetodos, the village where we were staying for the night, produced Crested Lark and Northern Wheatear, a Mute Swan on the village pond was not counted, this is a rare bird in Spain and obviously a feral one! But still it was not a bad start to our Pyrenees Tour. It was 28C when we arrived so a nice cold beer was called for and it was duly despatched on the hotel terrace, lovely.

DAY 2 – SUNDAY 21ST JUNE 2015

EL PLANERON – QUINTO DE EBRO – LOS MONEGROS – JACA – HECHO VALLEY

A very early start saw us leaving our lovely little hotel at 5:30am in the dark, we had a 30minute drive to Belchite and onto El Planeron we needed to get there at first light to get the best chance of seeing the **DUPONT'S LARK**. It all went to plan except that the Lark forgot to read the script! The weather was just perfect, a beautiful orange sunrise cast a colourful glow across this unique landscape and as we arrived many larks were up before us. We quickly noted Crested Lark, Short-toed Lark, Thekla Lark and Corn Bunting but our search for Dupont's remained unrewarded.

After an hour we moved deeper into the reserve where Black-eared Wheatear, Southern Grey Shrike, Little Owl, Red-legged Partridge and Lesser Short-toed Lark were noted, the eerie call of the Stone Curlew was heard just before the bird showed and a family party of Common Kestrels fed over the adjacent field.

It was extremely dry out on the plains but we found a couple of small pools where larks were coming to



drink and bathe, we had hoped for Sandgrouse but none appeared, Calandra and Short-toed Larks showed very well. On the way out of the area we stopped to watch a gang of Hoopoes, a Short-toed Eagle sitting on a derelict building, a couple of Ravens and another Stone Curlew in flight.

It was now 9am we had spent 3 hours on the El Planeron Reserve it was time for breakfast so we drove into Quinto making a couple of stops along the way to watch White Stork, Common Buzzard, Marsh Harrier and Black Kite. As it was a Sunday the town was shut except for a tiny bar where we ate tostada and marmalada with a double dose of Spanish Coffee.

Next we visited the Rio Ebro in Quinto where a huge ox-bow lake has almost formed (the river still flows into and out of it when the water level is high) this section of still water has masses of reed-beds and riparian woodland. It was full of birds but flies and midges which were annoying. We heard several Great Reed Warblers without seeing one, but we did see Reed Warbler, Common Kingfisher, Common Nightingale, Cetti's Warbler, Melodious Warbler and lots of Sand Martins.

We made several short walks along the banks of the 'lake' and found a family party of 4 Wrynecks, Spotted Flycatcher, Little Ringed Plover, several Purple Herons, Little Egret and both White & Yellow Wagtails. We left the area by driving a few kilometers along the river back to the main road.

From Quinto we drove to Los Monegros where the temperature was now at 33C, but a nice breeze cooled the air somewhat. However we did not stop for long, we found Spectacled Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Black-eared Wheatear, European Bee-eaters and many Black Kites. But raptors were our main target especially Golden Eagle, this area is a regular haunt for them because of the large number of Rabbits found there.

We saw a juvenile Bonelli's Eagle circling with some Black Kites and a very distant Golden Eagle, not the



best of sightings but good enough to ID the Goldie. From Los Monegros we headed for the Hecho Valley in the Pyrenees, we stopped for lunch along the autovia and again in Jaca, by this time the group were flagging in the heat. We made a very short walk to the 'citadel' ruins in the centre of Jaca where we nabbed our two target species in about 5 minutes. Rock Sparrow and Tree Sparrow are easy to see on the battlements, job done we were back in the car and heading for Hecho.

One final stop near Puente de Reina produced a nice Western Bonelli's Warbler and lots of butterflies, Knapweed

Fritillary, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Ilex Hairstreak, Mazarine Blue, Brimstone and several others. It was still hot at 5pm so a second ice-cream was called for before we completed the final leg of the journey by driving the 22 kilometers up the Hecho valley to our hotel. This last part of the drive was the most scenic of all, we had had superb views of the snow-capped mountains (very little snow this year) as we drove up from Huesca but now we were very close to them, stunning.

Our hosts Imanol and Lucia were most welcoming and after settling in we enjoyed a nice cold beer on the terrace before tucking into our delicious dinner. An early night followed as we were all very tired.

DAY 3 – MONDAY 22ND JUNE 2015

REFUGIO DE GABARDITO – UPPER HECHO VALLEY

I have never been to the Pyrenees and had such fantastic weather, it was just perfect, a clear sky not a whiff of air to rustle the leaves and a lovely temperature. Even our 7am walk was not cold, we left the hotel and walked down to the river, many birds were in song we could hear lots of Blackcaps and Garden Warblers it was a good lesson for the group to pick out the difference. Also singing was Song Thrush, lots of European Robins, Chaffinches and we did hear Black Woodpecker in the distance. We had good views of Cirl Bunting, Coal Tit, Crested Tit and a Blackcap. At the river all we saw was the back end of a Dipper as it flew off at 100mph.

After breakfast we made our way up to the Refugio Gabardito, the scenery is simply breath-taking at the top and so is the altitude! So we walked slowly to the now famous rock-face where a pair of Wallcreepers have bred for the last umpteen years. Along the way we heard both Green and Black Woodpecker and we saw Mistle Thrush, Coal Tit, Red-billed Chough, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures. As we drew near to the 'wallcreeper' rock-face we added Alpine Swift, Crag Martin, House Martin and Common Kestrel to the day-list.

We eventually climbed the final leg of the walk up a steep track below the cliff where we settled down and began to scan the 'face' which towered some 100-200 meters above us. A Black Redstart gave us a false alarm and the Red-billed Choughs kept us entertained whilst we waited.

After an hour the group were getting fidgety, so I suggested another 15 minutes and reminded them of my 100% record with this bird. Time passed and after another 10 minutes the elusive bird appeared, but it stayed at the very top of the cliff and only showed briefly a couple of times, enough time for me to get it in scope but not enough for everyone to have great views.

We left the 'creepers' wall soon after and headed back to the refugio, noting Wren, Eurasian Nuthatch, Eurasian Chiffchaff and a nice selection of butterflies along the way: Duke of Burgundy Fritillary, Mazarine Blue, Black-veined White, Cleopatra and a few others.



We ate our picnic lunch in the garden of the refugio, it was getting very warm by now so after a nice cup of coffee we drove back down the mountain to the river and followed the Hecho valley road right up to the head of the valley at the Spanish/French border. We made many stops to look at butterflies, orchids, lizards and a few birds. We also saw a very light coloured Red Fox, Alpine Marmot and some of the most wonderful scenery you could ever see.

I was a little disappointed with the wild flowers and numbers of butterflies and birds this year, the usual flower-show is either late or we have missed it. Bird numbers seemed low too, we never saw a single Red-

backed Shrike, only a few Yellowhammers, a single Garden Warbler and a couple of Dunnocks. There was the usual high number of Egyptian Vultures down in the valley mostly just drifting a few meters above us but also on the ground. Griffon Vultures, Red-billed Chough, Short-toed Eagle, Common Buzzard, Red Kite, Common Kestrel and a Peregrine Falcon made up the majority of our sightings.



We found several nice butterflies as they settled near some puddles to pick up mineral salts, there was: Dingy Skipper, Safflower Skipper, Marbled Skipper, Mazarine and Black-eyed Blue, Mountain Clouded Yellow, Large Wall, Red Admiral

and Painted Lady. Large tracts of wet areas were covered in Marsh Orchids and Cotton Grass but not much else was in flower.

As it approached 5pm we decided to give it another 15 minutes before quitting for the day, then as if by magic a LAMMERGEIER appeared over the distant mountain peaks. We had in-the-scope multiple

sightings of this majestic species but it was distant and it refused to come any closer. Well that was a great finale to our day in the Hecho Valley.

We ate a nice dinner at 8pm and drank the local wine before calling the bird log and retiring for the evening.

DAY 4 – TUESDAY 23RD JUNE 2015

RIO ARAGON – SANTA CILLIA AIRFIELD – ROAD TO ARRAS

Last night's thunderstorm had long gone when we got up today, it was another clear morning, the van was a little cleaner after the rain that was a bonus! Our pre-breakfast walk took us along the lane back down the valley towards Siresa, it was very quiet, only Blackcaps, Garden Warblers and Common Chaffinches were singing. We watched a Blackcap and had fleeting views of Garden Warbler but other than Carrion Crow, Jay and the group of Crag Martins nesting inside a road-tunnel we saw very little else.

After breakfast we drove down the valley to Puente de la Reina stopping once to look at our first Red-backed Shrike, we drove into a cloudy area but the light remained good and the temperature was just right. At the bridge (Puente) we turned towards Jaca, then after a kilometer we turned onto a track that took us down to the river Aragón where we spent a short time. At the river we found White Wagtail, Common Kingfisher and in the surrounding woodland we saw Spotted Flycatcher, Serin, Cetti's Warbler (heard), Golden Oriole and Rock Sparrow.

From the river we drove to Santa Cilia Airfield the route took us over the river once again and the road then ran through open fields as it climbed onto the airfield plateau. We parked along the perimeter fence and scanned scrub grassland and the airfield itself. We quickly found Eurasian Skylark, Northern Wheatear, Eurasian Linnets and lots of European Goldfinches. We hadn't walked far when a Tawny Pipit appeared on the fence-line, this was our main target bird, in the bag. We also had good views of both Black and Red Kites, Booted Eagle, Common Buzzard and a huge 'kettle' of Griffon Vultures before we left the area.



Next we visited a track along the Alastuey road near a stream we were hoping for a few scrub warblers but never got near one. We walked for about an hour, highlights were Great-spotted Woodpecker, Red-backed Shrike, we enjoyed the beautiful Cirl Bunting and endured several Corn Buntings. Turtle Doves 'turred' but never showed and a Common Nightingale was in full song but it too remained elusive. Another area of dense scrub and oak trees produced two very good sightings, first a Western Bonelli's Warbler showed very well and then a Firecrest showed even better.

After a quick coffee stop we went back to Puente de la Reina and turned onto another track that ran parallel to the river, a picnic area with tables provided our lunch venue. As we ate the sun broke through the clouds and butterflies galore ventured out. We saw over a dozen species which included Silver Washed, High Brown and Duke of Burgundy Fritillary, Marbled White, Pearly, Small and Chestnut Heaths, Blue-spot Hairstreak, Large Skipper, Damon, Silver-studded, Adonis, Spanish Chalk-hill Blues and several whites.

For the next hour we made our way along the track stopping now and then to search for scrub warblers without luck, we did see Common Stonechat, lots of Sand Martins, Crested Lark, Corn & Cirl Buntings and to our great surprise and fortune a Common Quail flushed from the grass on the side of the track, it landed just a few feet into a corn field, we got out of the car and it flushed again giving everyone a good view.

At the next bridge over the river we parked up and scanned the river, a Grey Heron stood in the water, a Common Sandpiper fed amongst the rocks and a Great Cormorant flew over as did a Yellow-legged Gull. We then drove a track into the nature reserve called Sotos de Martes and as we got out of the car we saw



three Woodlarks as they flew up into the trees.

Our walk to the river produced two species of Orchid and lots of butterflies (including the stunning Southern White Admiral), at the river we found two Green Sandpipers, a nice surprise, also more Great Cormorants, a Golden Oriole, some fledgling Common Nightingales and Garden Warblers. At 4pm we left the area and headed back to the hotel for an early finish, it was now over 30C. We did make one stop at the river in the Hecho Valley to look for Dipper but we ended up watching butterflies adding a few new species to our list.

Just after 5pm we arrived at the hotel where we had extra time for relaxation before dinner at eight.

DAY 5 – WEDNESDAY 24TH JUNE 2015

MONESTERIO SAN JUAN DE LA PEÑA – RIO GALLEGO – EMBALSE SOTONERA – RIGLOS – SANTA CRUZ

This was our longest day so far and the hottest! We spent the whole day down the valley out on the plains, we stayed out there for dinner and then we went Owling afterwards, we departed at 9am and returned to the hotel at 11pm, now that's what you call a day's birding.

Our first destination was the monastery San Juan De La Peña or rather the woodland that surrounds it, the drive there took us through some spectacular landscapes, we drove passed the old monastery that was built into a rock face before climbing up to new one built on a mini-plateau.

Our first walk took us through a forest of mixed pine, beech, oak and ash, it wasn't actually dripping with birds but there were enough to keep us amused during our 2 hour walk. We found a couple of family parties of Eurasian Bullfinches lots of Chaffinches, European Robins, Wren, Song Thrush and in fact, most of the birds that you would find in an English Country Garden! Blackcap, Eurasian Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Goldcrest and Jay. The only truly European birds we saw were Serin, Short-toed Treecreeper and Black Redstart.

The forest track climbed up to a radio mast and brought us out to the edge of the plateau where the views of the plains and the distant mountains were absolutely breath-taking. We heard a Black Woodpecker drumming and saw a few Griffon Vultures circling below us but not much else except a nice selection of butterflies.

The clear sky began to cloud over with white fluffy balls-of-cotton and it began to warm up significantly, after a brief visit to the monastery for coffee and toilets we drove on. Our next venue was the Rio Gallego, we followed the course of this river for 25 kilometers before stopping next to a reed covered pool. It was deathly silent except for the occasional Bee-eater and a single Golden Oriole, again it was butterflies that saved the day. We ate our picnic lunch and quickly moved on passing a huge reservoir with mineral rich water which had turned into a turquoise blue. After about half an hour we passed The famous Mallos de Riglos, these 'fingers' of pudding-stone are enormous vertical pillars that stretch up some 100 meters above the village of Riglos, we made a promise to stop there on the way back.

Next we visited the huge reservoir of Sotonera where we spent a couple of hours circumnavigating the water, we made many stops and although generally the bird numbers were way down on previous years we did see



a number of new species for the trip. There must have been over 50 Great-crested Grebes, some were carrying chicks on their backs, also Mallard, Common Pochard, both Grey and Purple Herons, Cattle, Little and Great Egrets, Yellow-legged, Black-headed and a single Lesser Black-backed Gull and two Tern species Common and Whiskered.

One of the stops produced Sardinian and Melodious Warblers some Corn Buntings but not much else, it was now 4pm so we set off for the return journey stopping at a small, river inlet where we saw Common Nightingale, Garden Warbler and Stonechat. At Riglos we viewed the village from a mirador, many vultures were drifting over also Short-toed Eagle, Red Kite, Red-billed Chough and hundreds of Common Swifts. A quick stop at Agüero was made to look at another impressive rock formation before we drove back towards Hecho.

We had dinner in a lovely setting in the village of Santa Crúz overlooking the ancient convent, we stayed until nearly dark hoping to see a Scop's Owl but none were calling, so we quickly made the short journey to

an Eagle Owl 'stake-out' which proved to be most successful. In perfect weather conditions (not a whiff of air or cloud in sight) and just as it got dark two birds began to call, they then flew up and perched at the top of a hill nicely silhouetted against the setting sun, fantastic. We then had an astronomy lesson from David as we 'scoped' Saturn, Venus, the Moon and Mars.



A brief return to the Convent to look for Scop's Owl was fruitless so we set off for the hotel, we arrived at 11:15pm, tired and ready for bed, it had been a very long but enjoyable day.

DAY 6 – THURSDAY 25TH JUNE 2015

HECHO TO ANSO TO RONÇAL VALLEY – BELAGUA FRONTIER PASS – LA PIERRE SAN MARTIN SKI RESORT – ASTUN SKI RESORT– HECHO VIA JACA

We made a large circular tour today of the high peaks, going over the border into France, passing through some of the most stunning scenery, the weather was absolutely perfect and the birding was superb.

We set off at 9am down the Hecho Valley to Hecho village, we hadn't gone 300 meters when we stopped to photograph a number of Griffon Vultures that were perched near the 'tunnel'.

From Hecho village we drove across to Anso Valley making a couple of stops, one at the height of this inter-valley road and the second near the Anso turning. We saw a few Griffon Vultures, Red & Black Kites, Common Buzzard and a pair of Blue Rock Thrushes near Anso.

We had sightings of one or two Dippers as we drove to the head of the Anso Valley where we stopped near Zorita to scan the mountains and river valley. A couple more Dippers were feeding in the river with Grey Wagtails and on the grassy slopes we found Serin, Linnet, Goldfinch and Black Redstart. Over the mountains we saw both Griffon Vultures and Red-billed Chough.



As we headed to the Roncal Valley we found a couple of obliging Red-backed Shrikes, White Wagtails, Cirl Buntings and more Red Kites. The head of the Roncal Valley culminates in a steep climb at Belagua the road winds its way up to the border crossing with France. Near the top we made a prolonged stop to watch good

numbers of Alpine Chough, we also found Northern Wheatear, lots of Black Redstarts and a couple of Water Pipits.



At the border we stopped to search for Ring Ouzel and Rock Thrush neither of which appeared at the usual places, however, we did find an Alpine Accentor which gave us brief but good views as we passed into France. At the Alpine-Village of Pierre San Martin we spent a good hour or so watching some nice species and searching for the elusive Ring Ouzel.

Citril Finches were everywhere in this deserted skiing-village together with Serins, Chaffinches and Goldfinches. We had a couple of sightings of Mistle Thrush and whilst we sat eating our picnic lunch a pair of **LAMMERGEIERS** drifted around the nearby mountain ridge, again this wasn't a great view but in good light the birds looked magnificent. A walk up to the lower ski-slopes produced much of the same plus lots of Black Redstarts.

It was now getting hot in the middle of the afternoon so we made our way down into France to pick up the road back into Spain via the Port de Somport and the skiing village of Astun. It clouded over a little and a breeze picked up so the temperature dropped to a comfortable level. Astun came up trumps with **ROCK THRUSH** we had superb views of a male, we also had our best views of



CITRIL FINCH as a few fed on the ground not too far from us. Grey Wagtail, Dipper, Black Redstart, Red-billed Chough, Raven, Northern Wheatear and Yellowhammer made up the rest of sightings. We left this high-altitude environment at 5:30pm as we drove back into Spain passing through Jaca along the route to the Hecho Valley.

We arrived in good time to pack and get ready for our last evening in the Pyrenees, tomorrow we will be heading to the Picos de Europa to complete the tour.

DAY 7 – FRIDAY 26TH JUNE 2015

TRANSFER TO THE PICOS VIA PAMPLONA – LOGROÑO – EMBALSE DE EBRO – POTES

Not very much to report bird-wise for today as we spent most of the day travelling, the weather was excellent all the way with low cloud/mist around the huge Ebro Lake in the afternoon. We set off at 9am after saying goodbye to our lovely hosts Lucia & Imanol and headed down the valley to the main road, we noted Black & Red Kites, Common Buzzard, Corn Bunting, Stonechat and Red-backed Shrike.

After 2 hours we stopped just before Logroño for a coffee and toilet break, we hadn't seen much other than more kites, Marsh Harriers and Griffon Vultures. Another two hours found us not far from Santander in the winding valleys and Gorges near Oña, where we stopped for a light tapas lunch in the beautiful town square. It was now over 30C so we were happy to get back into the air conditioned van.



We made a couple of short stops to look at raptors, one particular bird looked very much like a Honey Buzzard but failed to show enough as it drifted away in the distance. A prolonged stop was made in the mountains near Sencilla, we parked in a position that gave us panoramic views over a large area of pasture, heath and pine forest. The birding there was good, a Common Cuckoo called as we got out of the car, then we saw small flocks of Red-billed Chough, Ravens, Crows, Egyptian Vultures, Common Buzzard, Booted Eagle and distant Short-toed Eagle. Along the fence-lines we saw Stonechat, Linnet, Black-eared Wheatear,

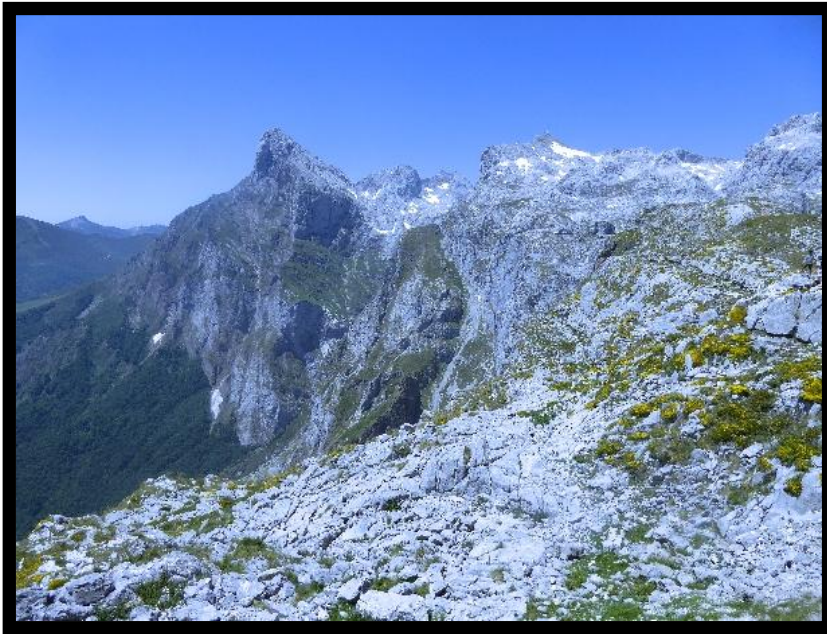
the obligatory Corn Bunting and a Great Spotted Woodpecker flew from the woods to a small copse of trees.



We ate our picnic lunch during this latter stop then we piled back into the car and drove the short distance to the Embalse de Ebro, this huge reservoir is some 30km in length and was covered in a light mist with heavy cloud clinging to the surrounding hillside, it was also very windy at this

northern end. We drove along the entire length of the reservoir making several stops, the birding was

disappointing, we only saw single Yellow-legged Gulls, Grey Heron, small flocks of Mallard and Gadwall, a few Great-crested Grebes and a single Eurasian Coot.



It was now 4pm so we had to press on, we could see the peaks of Picos de Europa in the distance, very little snow was on them which was a good sign. The winding roads were slow going it took another 1 1/2 hours to get to Potes, we made one stop along the way where we were able to watch a distant Hobby and a couple of Ravens.

At Potes we stopped to buy picnic supplies for tomorrow before finishing the last 15 kilometers to our hotel, we arrived at 6pm, it had been a long day on the road, we passed through some fantastic scenery but now we were all tired, so a nice shower followed by a cold beer was called for.

It was warm enough to sit out on the hotel terrace for dinner, a babbling brook could be heard across the road, we all relaxed as we discussed our plans for tomorrow and our visit to the high peaks using the cable car from Fuente Dé, exciting stuff!

DAY 8 – SATURDAY 27TH JUNE 2015

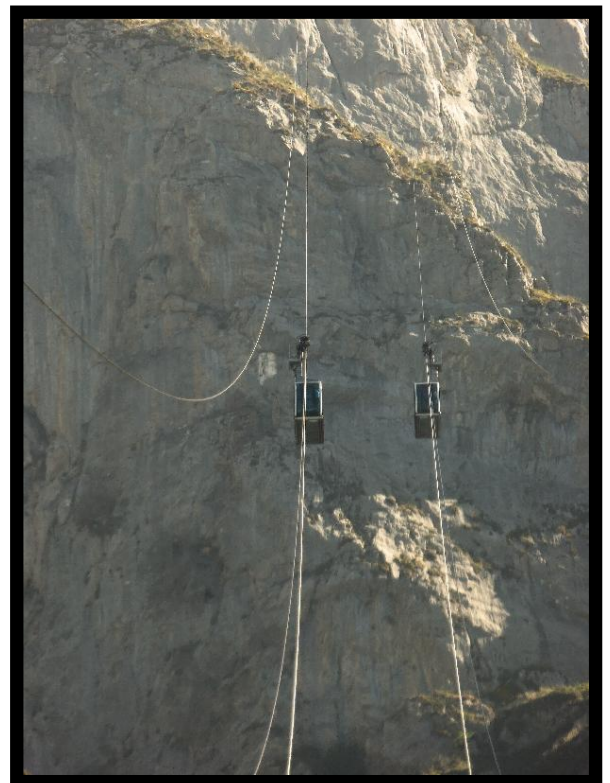
FUENTE DÉ CABLE CAR TO THE PEAKS – PEMBES

This was it, the reason why we came all this way, our day up in the high peaks was here! We were catching the cable-car to look for specialist altitude species and to see some of the most spectacular and unusual landscapes seen anywhere else in Spain.

We ate breakfast at 8am and set off to Fuente Dé arriving at 9am, we made sure we that we allowed plenty of time because there can be large queues at weekends. We were amongst the first to arrive and got on the second car that went up, this incredible journey that takes 3 minutes, rising 754 meters, reaching a height of 1824 meters above sea-level at the top.

The weather was superb, absolutely clear with no wind and excellent light, we began our walk and it wasn't long before we found our first birds. A Northern Wheatear sang and displayed, so did a Water Pipit and they both landed on rocks not too far from the path.

Both Red-billed and Alpine Chough flew over every few minutes and we could see many Griffon Vultures circling the peaks ahead of us but overall there weren't too many birds or butterflies to look at. A little further along the path we listed



Black Redstart and Eurasian Linnet and then one of main target birds flew over, a male **SNOW FINCH**, it was brief but unmistakable.



As we approached the huge cliff-face of Peñon Vieja (this rises to 2540 meters) we could see several **SNOW FINCHES** as they visited their nest sites hidden high up small fissures. There were probably about a dozen pairs in this area and most of them were feeding young.

We spent the next hour watching them, Mike and I from one side of the huge cliff-face and David and Catriona from the around the corner. We finally found an **ALPINE ACCENTOR** collecting food down below us, it was a long way down but it flew up towards us carrying food. We then found a couple of Chamois feeding on the slope above us.

We ate lunch sitting on the side of the track, we watched **SNOW FINCHES** and Griffon Vultures and a Short-toed Eagle passed over but it was very high up. The area was getting very crowded with day trippers, hundreds were pouring out onto the tracks, there were climbers, cyclists, trekkers, walkers, rambblers and family parties. We decided to leave at 1:30pm and got back down to the car park by 2pm, it was very crowded there so we drove the 7km back to the hotel where we took a break during the heat of the afternoon.

At 3:30pm it was still very hot but we still decided to take a walk in the hills above the hotel, it would be cooler beneath the trees so we drove the short distance to Pombes, an unspoilt village nestled in beech forest some 10km away. The village is like a living museum, ram-shackled buildings dating some 200 years old look as though they might fall at any moment. Whilst others look neat and tidy and well-tended, the village is a haven for birds. We saw White Wagtails, Black Redstarts, Spotted Flycatchers, Serins, Barn Swallows and hundreds of House Sparrows, all using the old buildings for nesting in.

Just outside the village we found a family party of Common Redstarts, some Jays and several European Goldfinch flocks, we continued up a steep path into the beech woods hoping for a sighting of a **MIDDLE SPOTTED WOODPECKER** but we never saw much at all, we heard Eurasian Nuthatch and Bullfinch but not a sight nor sound of any woodpeckers.

On the way down we paid more attention to the sky and saw a couple of pairs of Common Buzzards, a Eurasian Sparrowhawk and we spotted a very large raptor in the distance, this turned out to be a **GOLDEN EAGLE** (yet another distant sighting of this species).

We returned to the hotel at 6pm in good time for dinner which was taken on the terrace, a lovely beef steak and a glass of red wine finished off a lovely day.

DAY 9 – SUNDAY 28TH JUNE 2015

TRANSFER FROM PICOS DE EUROPA TO MADRID WITH STOPS AT FUENTE DÉ AND SAN VICENTE DE LA BARQUERA

We made an early morning excursion to the woodland around Fuente Dé, it was extremely quiet we saw Chaffinch and Jay and heard Blackcap and not much else. Back at the hotel we watched Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Wren and a Song Thrush in or around the river.

At 9am we were packed and loaded up in the van, we set off for Madrid, we chose to go via the coast so that we could visit San Vicente salt marsh which has produced some nice species in past trips. We arrived after about an hour and parked at the far end of the causeway bridge where we had great views of the marina and the salt marsh. The marsh looked quite barren at first but we started to find a number of Eurasian Curlews, good numbers of Mallard and then we picked out two Common Greenshanks with a single Common Redshank.

Further scrutiny produced two Whimbrels and an Osprey was found sitting on a post, we also scanned the marina but only found Yellow-legged Gulls and a single Black-headed Gull. We drove on along the coast road and just before we joined the motorway a pair of Honey Buzzards circled over the car, these were our first of the trip!

The journey to Madrid took 4 hours, with a couple of short breaks, we noted a number of species along the



way, Egyptian & Griffon Vultures, Red & Black Kites, Common Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Raven, a couple of Black-winged Stilts in a pool, lots of Crested Larks and Corn Buntings, Goldfinches and Linnets.

The trip was over as I dropped my 3 amigos at Madrid Airport at 3pm.

In summary it had been a struggle to find a lot of species because it was so hot and dry and the trip was 10 days later than usual. Subsequently the list was much smaller (139 seen and 6 more heard-only) and sightings were not the best, we did see nearly all of the specialities but most were distant and brief. Many species had already bred, fledglings were everywhere, so bird song was at a minimum, for example we only heard two Common Cuckoos throughout the week whereas in past trips we heard 10 a day! Flowers and butterflies were also reduced due to the dry nature of the season, most flowers had gone over and many butterflies were not around, we only listed 48 species of butterfly compared to last year's total of over 70!

The scenery was still magical, all three areas we visited has a unique set of geological characteristics, with exquisite landscapes and sometimes breath-taking vistas, it is a wonderful place to visit, next year's tour will be 10 days earlier, I am looking forward to it already.

LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED 20TH – 28TH JUNE 2015

SPECIES			DATE SEEN									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>						√		√		
2	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>					√					
3	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			√			√				√
4	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>		√				√				
5	Great White Egret	<i>Alba</i>						√				
6	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		√	√		√	√		√		√
7	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>			√			√				
8	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>			√			√		√		√
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>						√	√	√		
10	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>						√				
11	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya</i>						√				
12	Lammergeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>				√			√			
13	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
14	Eurasian Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
15	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>										√
16	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>										√
17	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
18	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>		√	√		√	√	√	√		√
19	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			√	√	√	√	√	√		√
20	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennatus</i>		√			√	√		√		√
21	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>			√						√	
22	Bonelli’s Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>			√							
23	Short-toed Snake-Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
24	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			√						√	
25	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		√	√		√	√	√	√		√
26	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>								√		
27	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		√	√	√		√	√	√		√
28	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				√						
29	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>					√					
30	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			√							
31	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						H		√		
32	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>										√
33	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>			√							
34	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			√							
35	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>										√
36	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>										√
37	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					√					
38	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>					√					

39	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>										√
40	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>										√
41	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			√		√	√		√		√
42	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>					√					
43	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>					√					√
44	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>					√					
45	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>					√					
46	Rock Dove /Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		√	√		√			√		√
47	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		√			H	√				√
48	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		√	√			√				√
49	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		√	√		√	√				√
50	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			H					H		
51	Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>					√					
52	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			√							
53	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>				√						
54	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		√	√		√	√		√	√	√
55	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		√								
56]	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			√		√					
57	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>			√			√				
58	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			√							
59	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridus</i>				H						
60	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		√			√			√		
61	Black Woodpecker	<i>Drycopus martius</i>				H		H				
62	Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquatta</i>		√	√							
63	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			√		√					
64	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			√							
65	Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					√					
66	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		√	√		√	√				√
67	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>			√							
68	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			√							
69	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>			√							
70	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			√		√					
71	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>			√	√	√	√	√	√		
72	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
73	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
74	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>					√	√				
75	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>							√		√	
76	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
77	(Spanish) Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>			√			√				
78	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				√			√	√	√	√
79	White Throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				√			√		√	√
80	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>				√	√		√			√
81	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>							√		√	
82	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				√	√	√	√		√	√
83	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>			√		√	√				
84	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			√	√		√	√	√	√	
85	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>									√	
86	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>				√	√	√	√	√		
87	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		√	√		√	√	√	√	√	
88	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>		√	√					√		
89	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				√	√				√	√

90	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			√	√			√			
91	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
92	Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		√				√				
93	Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>						√				
94	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>				√	√	√	H		H	
95	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			H	√	√	H	√	H	√	H
96	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				H						
97	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>						√				
98	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			√							
99	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>			√							
100	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		√								
101	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			√		H	H				
102	Great Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>			H							
103	Eurasian Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			√							
104	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>			√			√				
105	Western Bonelli’s Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			√		√					
106	Eurasian chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus colybita</i>				H		H				
107	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>						√				
108	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>					√					
109	Wren	<i>Troglodytes trogladytes</i>				√		H			√	√
110	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			√		√	√	√		√	
111	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>					√					
112	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>				√		√				
113	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>			√	√	√	√			√	
114	Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>				√						
115	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		√								
116	Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>				√						
117	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				H		√			H	
118	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>						√				
119	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>			√					√		
120	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>					√	√	√	√		
121	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>			√			√				
122	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
123	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				√	√	√	√	√	√	√
124	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			√							√
125	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>				√		√		√	√	
126	Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>							√		√	
127	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
128	Common or Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			√	√	√		√	√	√	√
129	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		√	√		√	√		√		√
130	Eurasian Golden-Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		√	H		√	√				
131	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
132	Eurasian Tree-Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>			√	√						
133	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>			√		√					
134	Snowfinch (White-winged)	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>									√	
135	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			H	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
136	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
137	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
138	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		√	√		√	√				
139	Citril Finch	<i>Carduelis citrinella</i>				√			√			
140	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

141	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				√		√			H	
142	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>				√			√			
143	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				√	√	√	√			
144	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>		√	√		√	√		√		√
145	Monk Parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>		√								

‘BUTTERFLIES												
SPECIES												
	<u>PAPILIONIDAE</u>		DATE									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
1	Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Ipheclides podalirius</i>		√								
	<u>PIERIDAE</u>											
2	Black-veined white	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>			√		√	√		√		
3	Large white	<i>Pieris brassica</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
4	Small white	<i>Artogeia rapae</i>		√	√	√	√	√		√	√	
5	Mountain clouded yellow	<i>Colias phicomone</i>			√					√		
6	Pale clouded yellow	<i>Colias palaeno</i>			√							
7	Clouded yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		√			√	√	√			
8	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>			√	√	√		√		√	
9	Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>		√		√	√	√				
10	Wood white	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>			√		√	√				
	<u>LYCAENIDAE</u>											
11	Ilex hairstreak	<i>Satyrrium ilicis</i>			√			√				
12	Blue-spot Hairstreak	<i>Satyrrium</i>					√	√				
13	Spanish Chalk-hill Blue	<i>Lysandra albicans</i>					√					
14	Silver Studded Blue	<i>Plebejus argus</i>					√					
15	Black eyed Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche melanops</i>			√							
16	Brown argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>								√		
17	Damon Blue	<i>Agrodiaetus damon</i>					√					
18	Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>			√	√						
19	Adonis blue	<i>Lysandra bellargus</i>					√					
	<u>RIODINIDAE</u>											
20	Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>			√	√	√					
	<u>NYMPHALIDAE</u>		DATE									
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
21	Southern white admiral	<i>Limnitis reducta</i>				√	√					
22	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		√		√						
23	Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>			√	√						
24	Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>							√	√		
25	Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>				√	√		√			
26	High-brown Fritillary	<i>Argynnis adippe</i>				√						
27	Queen of Spain fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>			√							
28	Knapweed Fritillary	<i>Melitaea phoebe</i>				√				√		
	<u>SATYRIDAE</u>											
29	Marbled white	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>					√	√	√	√	√	

30	Spanish Marbled White	<i>Melanargia ines</i>			√	√	√	√				
31	Great-banded Grayling	<i>Kanetisa circe</i>								√		
32	Common brassy ringlet	<i>Erebia cassioides</i>				√			√			
33	Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>			√		√	√	√	√	√	
34	Spanish gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia bathseba</i>					√	√	√	√		
35	Small heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>					√					
36	Dusky heath	<i>Coenonympha dorus</i>						√				
37	Pearly Heath	<i>Coenonympha arcania</i>				√	√	√				
38	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		√	√		√				√	
39	Wall brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>			√			√	√			
40	Large Wall brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>				√						

HESPERIIDAE

DATE

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

41	Grizzled skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>				√						
42	Mallow skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>				√						
43	Marbled skipper	<i>Carcharodus lavatherae</i>				√						
44	Dingy skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>				√						
45	Red-underwing skipper	<i>Spialia sertorius</i>					√					
46	Silver-spotted skipper	<i>Hesperia comma</i>									√	
47	Small skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>			√	√						
48	Large skipper	<i>Ochlodes venatus</i>					√					

OTHER LEPIDOPTERA/MAMMALS/REPTILES/AMPHIBIANS/INSECTS

SPECIES

DATE

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

	Hummingbird Hawk Moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>			√		√	√	√	√		
	European Pond Terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>		√			√		√			
	Red-faced Slider	<i>Trachemys scripta</i>		√								
	Pyrenean Chamois	<i>Ruicapra rupicapra</i>									√	
	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		√	√							
	Alpine Marmot	<i>Marmota marmota</i>				√						
	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			√	√			√			
	Common Pipistrelle bat	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>						√	√			
	Iberian Rock Lizard	<i>Lacerta monticola</i>				√			√			
	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanica</i>			√							
	Spiney-footed Lizard	<i>Acanthoddactylus erythrurus</i>			√							
	Large Psammondramos	<i>Psammondramus algirus</i>			√							