

# WILD SPAIN

8-19 MAY 2005

## TOUR REPORT

**LEADER:** SIMON HARRAP

The 2005 Birdquest to Spain was another very successful trip to one of the greatest birding areas in Europe. We recorded 161 species in the most delightful surroundings. In Extremadura we found both Great and Little Bustards, Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, three species of vulture, Black-shouldered Kite, Bonelli's Eagle and four Spanish Eagles, including one at the nest. Other highlights included a surprise Bald Ibis, good views of Eurasian Eagle Owl, Great Spotted Cuckoo and Orphean Warbler, and, at the local reservoir, Purple Gallinule and Savi's Warbler. We also visited the Gredos, where Iberian Green Woodpecker, Water Pipit, Bluethroat, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Bonelli's Warblers were complemented by the fantastic scenery. Moving north and east we had good views of Dupont's Larks near Zaragoza, and in the Pyrenees we amazed at up to three Lammergeiers in the air together, enjoyed prolonged views of Citril Finch, found Iberian Chiffchaff and Black Woodpecker and, best of all, had superb looks at Wallcreeper.

Coming from the USA, Australia, Britain and Spain, we all met up at Madrid airport on Sunday lunchtime at the start of our great Spanish adventure. After a snack lunch we headed west to Extremadura, a fast and easy journey on the EU-funded 'autovia'. We had time to stop for a while at the small lakes near Almaraz, where we enjoyed Little and Gull-billed Terns, Purple Heron, a brief male Little Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Stilt, Common Kingfisher and the first of many White Storks. We then continued on to our 'rural' hotel; in fact a very spacious, comfortable and, indeed, rather grand hotel in an idyllic setting. Red-rumped Swallows and Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpies were nesting in the gardens and drinks on the patio followed by dinner were a fitting end to our first day in Spain.

After a pre-breakfast look around the gardens we headed to an area of steppes near Trujillo. Acting on a 'tip-off' our target was potentially a great rarity, Northern Bald Ibis. This has been in the area since February and may well be wild, but could, it is rumoured, originate from a re-introduction programme in Portugal in which, so the story goes, not all the birds are ringed and tagged. After a short wait the ibis flew in and we had great views; a pleasure to see whatever its origins. It fed amongst the storks and Jackdaws and our time was certainly not wasted because a Black-shouldered Kite also appeared and allowed us good looks as it hovered over the steppe and sat on fence posts (and it distracted us from the only Little Bustard of the day, a male in flight).

Spain, in common with much of south-west Europe, had an extremely dry winter and where there should be expanses of waving grasses and flowers the vegetation was largely parched and withered. Nevertheless, the steppes were alive with the songs of Calandra and Crested Larks, while Short-toed Larks scampered along the tracks in front of us. Overhead Eurasian Griffon and Black Vultures soared like flying barn doors and moving down the road we found something equally large: a troop of five Great Bustards. The males were strutting around the plain, engaging in their amazing chrysanthemum display from time to time, in which they transformed themselves into a white pom-pom. Flushed with these early successes we moved onto an area of steppe to the north-east of Caceres to look for more plains birds, but this proved to be far less successful as it became increasingly windy. A young Bonelli's Eagle sailed overhead, however, and several European Rollers graced the roadside wires, and we also found a large group of Eurasian Griffon Vultures loafing on the ground, presumably digesting a recent meal. The afternoon was marked by a bizarre event as we were stopped on a rutted road in the middle of nowhere by three policemen on motorbikes to have our vehicles' papers inspected. We moved on without incident, and a stop at a nearby reservoir was no more productive than the steppes, with just Little Egret and Little Ringed Plover to add to the list, but we finished the day nicely with a visit to the Plaza Major in Trujillo where we had great views of Lesser Kestrel and picked out a few Pallid Swifts amongst the Common Swifts.

Our second day at Trujillo was the opposite of the first, in that it started very poorly but then got better and better. A pre-dawn excursion to look for Red-necked Nightjar produced only some distant calls; a real frustration. Then, after breakfast, I decided to head north to Monfragüe via the motorway to avoid some long-standing roadworks. In doing so, however, we encountered a whole new set of roadworks and ended up being turned around just three or four km from our goal (the road was completely blocked by a tarmac-laying contraption) and were forced to undertake a 50km detour to make that final few kilometres. It was worthwhile in the end, however, as we arrived at the first spot on the day's itinerary and within seconds were admiring an adult Spanish Eagle sitting on a tree top at relatively close range, giving the best views ever. Its mate was nearby on the tree-top nest and after a while we had great flight views too, a definitive experience. Moving on to some nearby Cork Oak forest we found Common Nuthatch and Short-toed Treecreeper and then, after lunch, a stop at some more scattered oaks produced a pair of superb Western Orphean Warblers, all pale 'surprised' eyes and hulking bodies. Finally, we returned to the huge rocky crag near the eagle's nest and were quickly admiring a juvenile Eurasian Eagle Owl sitting at the entrance to a crevice. Indeed, it was so mature that it looked very much like an adult and only its patches of grey down gave the game away. A Black Stork on the nest quickly followed and so it was a happy crew that headed home (taking the direct route this time) for a welcome shower and a beer. All was not quite over for the day, as we spent 30 minutes after dinner chasing a European Scops Owl around the gardens of the hotel, but saw absolutely nothing!

Keen to catch up on plains birds we headed out early the next morning to the vast fields north-west of Trujillo and very soon were watching some superb male Little Bustards as they gave their 'raspberry' calls and puffed up their neck ruffs. A pair of Great-spotted Cuckoos were equally vociferous and also showed superbly. Moving on, the next stop produced Black-bellied Sandgrouse almost immediately and, after a Little Owl 'distraction', a group of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse showed well in the crisp morning air, giving great scope views despite the distance. After breakfast we headed back north to Monfragüe and at the first stop watched Spanish Sparrows at the nest, a family of dusky Spanish Long-tailed Tits and an Egyptian Vulture or two. We then moved on to Castle Monfragüe and the nearby rock pinnacle of Pena Falcon. Here we were lucky enough to find a Hawfinch feeding on the ground and enjoyed scope views of this often shy bird. Rock Buntings sang from...the rocks...and a pair of Red-billed Choughs wheeled overhead. An impressive pair of Black Storks flew in formation to and fro in front of their nest before settling on the rocks in full sunlight, while all the while Eurasian Griffon Vultures were circling overhead. It was a magical place. Much of the afternoon was spent chasing Thekla Lark and, after a long, hard look at some Crested Larks, we eventually found a

convincing Thekla. And, as a real bonus, an adult and a first year Spanish Imperial Eagle were found sitting on roadside pylons and, once we had found somewhere to park, we had good scope views. Another great end to a great day.

Our final day in Extremadura started with another attempt at Red-necked Nightjar, but this was even more of a failure than the first as we did not even hear one. The next excursion, to the Belen Plains, was much more of a success and we had great views of 21 Great Bustards strutting their stuff. Several nearby Little Bustards provided an illuminating size comparison and we found a single Stone Curlew. Saying goodbye to our 'Rural' hotel and delightful hosts, we headed south for a while and at a lonely outcrop of rock found the hoped-for Black Wheatear as well as a superb adult Bonelli's Eagle. It was then back north (logical, eh?) to the Gredos, stopping on the way at the lakes at Almaraz. On this second visit Purple Swamphens showed themselves, as did Savi's Warbler, and we had a surprise in the form of three Bearded Tits, including a moustachioed male; how did this species get its English name? All day we had more or less managed to dodge the rain (the first in Extremadura for months) and the weather slowly brightened as we approached the cool heights of our destination, the lovely Parador Gredos.

On our first day in the Gredos we managed to dodge most of the rain and found almost all of our target birds, with the exception of Citril Finch, which was noticeable by its absence during our pre-breakfast walk, although we did have nice views of a singing Bonelli's Warbler. After breakfast, in fine weather, we headed up to an area of broom scrub at high altitude and quickly found a couple of singing male Bluethroats. These little wonders have a superb satin-blue throat but, as usual in the Gredos, no white spots. There were also several Common Whitethroats and Eurasian Skylarks, as well as a Yellow Wagtail of the Iberian race – Spanish Wagtail. European Honey Buzzard, Eurasian Hobby and Ortolan Bunting were also seen. Descending to lower altitudes we worked a short road through the forest and managed to find Iberian Green Woodpecker although, as seems to be typical with this species, it was hard to get good views. After a picnic lunch at a convenient roadside shelter (it was by now raining) we headed up to La Plataforma. Here there was more rain but after a post-prandial nap the cloud lifted and we had great views of a male Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush as well as Water Pipit and some very tame Rock Buntings. The highlight seemed to be, judging from the group's reactions, the herd of Spanish Ibex that scampered over the slopes near the car park and then settled down to chew the cud. More rain followed, and thus an early retreat to the hotel was in order.

Our second morning at the Gredos started very much like the first, staring at an expanse of lawn with many nodding dandelion seed heads but no Citril Finches. We didn't have much time to spare but did manage to tease out another Iberian Green Woodpecker, although it was rather sneaky and only showed well in flight. We then left the mountains and headed north and east, via Madrid, for the vast empty plains around Zaragoza. It was a long drive, broken by a sumptuous (and certainly large) meal at a roadside restaurant. At last we arrived and then the fun began. We knew where our hotel was, but finding it was another matter. The city was packed with traffic and the street names were few and well-hidden. Nevertheless, in the end a bit of inspired guesswork and a helpful Spaniard got us to our goal and we could relax! Up early the next morning for a pre-dawn departure (which in Spain means six-o'clock) we headed out to an area of barren scrub and dry grass. Lesser Short-toed Larks were everywhere and soon we were listening to the strange nasal calls of Dupont's Larks but, as usual, seeing the beast was a different matter. It took around two hours of hard work, scanning and scanning again, before we finally got some good scope views and could admire this most elusive of larks. In the same area a migrant Pied Flycatcher was a surprise (and initially confusing). Well satisfied, we headed confidently (and this time unerringly) back to the hotel for breakfast. Trying to leave Zaragoza was almost as hard as getting into the city, the police had closed one of the main bridges over the Ebro and merely watched the resulting free-for-all impassively. But at last we escaped and drove to Jaca in the foothills of the Pyrenees, our home for the next four nights. After checking into the hotel we headed to an area of woodland around the monasteries at San Juan de la Pena and enjoyed Firecrest, Crested Tit and some noisy Black Woodpeckers before heading back for dinner.

The weather in the Pyrenees is always unpredictable and, as the skies looked more or less reasonable, on our first full day at Jaca I decided to head for the hills. This was to prove a fortunate decision, as the gods smiled upon us. As we parked up at the end of the long and winding road up the Hecho valley dozens of Eurasian Griffon Vultures were soaring over the crags and on the slow walk up the hill it was not long before the cry of 'Lammergeier' went up. We had a good look at this magnificent vulture and then continued on our way. Standing below a sombre rock wall my fingers were crossed but I need not have worried as before long a Wallcreeper was spotted high up on the rock face. It disappeared, but we only had to wait a few minutes for two birds to appear in an aerial dog fight. The male landed low down in full view and we went on to enjoy great scope views of this most wanted bird as he flicked his crimson wings and shuffled jerkily up the rocks. Standing there enjoying such a great bird in such a magical setting, the experience was capped when three Lammergeiers sailed down the valley past us. Red-billed Choughs tumbled past and we scoped some much more distant Alpine Choughs, as well as several Pyrenean Chamois. Well satisfied, we wandered back down the trail for lunch but just as we reached the van another much wanted bird was spotted: Citril Finch. We had great views of several of these delightful finches as they sat on pines and scabbled about in some gravel by the litter bins (of course)! After lunch we slowly returned to Jaca, making several stops along the way, and picking up some common European species such as Common Chiffchaff, Garden Warbler, Marsh Tit and Eurasian Bullfinch, as well as the more exotic Cirl Bunting and Red-backed Shrike – these last two species showing particularly well.

On our second day at Jaca we headed west to Foz de Lumbier, a dramatic gorge that cuts, knife-like, through the foothills. We were soon watching our principal target, an Iberian Chiffchaff, calling like a lost chick and looking very much like a cross between a Common Chiffchaff and a Willow Warbler. We then walked along the track of an old railway that follows the course of the gorge, navigating by torchlight the two tunnels hewn through the rock to carry the track. Squadrons of Eurasian Griffon Vultures sailed low overhead and gangs of Red-billed Choughs wheeled and spiralled. It was a cold, grey and increasingly windy morning, but nevertheless we did manage to find some smaller birds too, notably a couple of singing Melodious Warblers, before we beat a retreat to the buses and headed back east, hoping for more clement weather. In the event we were thwarted, for even the Anso valley could offer no respite and we were forced to picnic in the shelter of the buses or standing in the road tunnels. Despite appearing to ease from time to time, the rain just carried on and on and in the end we beat an early retreat back to the hotel for, as one relieved participant hoped, a warm bath and a cold beer!

On our last day in the Pyrenees the gods smiled on us once again as we awoke to clear blue skies. We headed up to the French border at Portalet, a bizarre area of shops and supermarkets at 1700m. Yesterday's rain had fallen as snow here but we followed a broad track into the mountains for a while, finding both Red-billed and Alpine Choughs and many Water Pipits and Eurasian Skylarks as well as a few Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrushes and Yellowhammers. The highlight was a superbly marked European Honey Buzzard drifting over the pass. Mammal interest was provided by three Pyrenean Chamois and several Alpine Marmots. It was clear, however, after a while that we were unlikely to find much more so we drove down the hill and had a couple of stops in some superb flower-filled alpine meadows, where the purples and yellows of Elder-flowered Orchids mixed with the sombre blue of Trumpet Gentian and the dazzling pure blue of Spring Gentian. We then continued further down hill and, taking a side road, found a quiet spot to picnic in the sunshine, enjoying a grand view and as many as ten species of butterfly. Heading back towards Jaca, our final target was Black Woodpecker and trawling through some pine forest produce great views of a male as he flew unerringly through the trees and stopped once in a while to drum. Sadly, it was then time to return to the hotel for the final time, pack and eat a final dinner ('shark to the plate' and 'ice cream with scum'). We headed back to Madrid the next day for the parting of the ways, a sad event on any tour but especially poignant at the end of a trip that had not only been very successful but had also been such great fun.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

### PODICIPEDIDAE

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: A few on the big reservoir west of Jaca.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: One at the lake at Almaraz and a singleton on the big reservoir west of Jaca.

### PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: One flew over the Belen Plain.

### ARDEIDAE

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: A male seen in flight on our first afternoon at the lake at Almaraz.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: Abundant in Extremadura.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: One at the lake near Cáceres, and one other seen en route.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: A scatter, sometimes in 'dry' habitats.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Breeding at the lake near Almaraz.

### THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Northern Bald Ibis (Bald Ibis) *Geronticus eremita*: One on the plains west of Belen is the 'third' for Spain and has been present since February. There is a re-introduction programme in southern Spain, but the birds there are ringed and wing-tagged. There is also said to be some sort of programme in Portugal, but we have little details of this. A wild origin is thus not impossible.

### CICONIIDAE

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*: A number of sightings, including birds at the nest in Monfragüe NP at Pena Falcon and Portilla del Tietar.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: Abundant in Extremadura, but almost absent in the Pyrenees.

### ANATIDAE

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: A scatter.

### ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: One in the Gredos and a superbly marked bird at the pass at Portalet in the Pyrenees.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*: Great views of a bird near Belen.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: Common.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*: Far less numerous than Black Kite, but many great views of this superb raptor.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*: Superb views in the Hecho valley, including three flying together.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*: A scatter, with especially good views near Jaca.

Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*: Abundant, with nesting/roosting birds at two cliff sites in Monfragüe and several others in the Pyrenees.

Eurasian Black Vulture (Cinereous Vulture) *Aegypius monachus*: Common on the plains around Trujillo.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: A scatter, with an especially good look at a bird over the road at Portalet in the Pyrenees.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: A male at the lakes near Almaraz.  
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: A couple of loose colonies on the plains, with some brilliant views of very tame birds sitting in the fields and on track-side fence posts.  
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: Surprisingly thin on the ground.  
Spanish Eagle *Aquila adalberti*: One on a nest at Portilla del Tietar with the other adult sitting on a tree nearby. These showed superbly, both at rest and in flight, and we then had the bonus of finding an adult and an immature sitting on roadside pylons. The best views yet on a Birdquest.  
Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: One in the Pyrenees 'stooped' quickly out of view.  
Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*: Many seen at Monfragüe, the Gredos and the Pyrenees. Suspiciously, most were light-phase birds (perhaps the dark phase individuals are 'lost' among the Black Kites?).  
Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*: An immature in the plains near Cáceres and good views of an adult near Alange.

#### FALCONIDAE

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*: Common on the steppes around Trujillo, and also seen in good numbers at the Plaza Major.  
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Seen almost daily.  
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: One in the Gredos.  
Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*: A couple in the Pyrenees.

#### PHASIANIDAE

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*: Small numbers seen.  
Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H): Heard once, near Jaca (from a moving bus!).

#### RALLIDAE

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A few at Almaraz.  
Purple Swamp-hen (Purple Gallinule) *Porphyrio porphyrio*: At least two at the lake near Almaraz on our second visit.  
Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: A couple on the first afternoon at the lake at Almaraz.

#### OTIDIDAE

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*: Very elusive on our first day on the plains, perhaps due to the increasingly windy conditions, but good numbers subsequently, the males giving their 'raspberry' call.  
Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: Five on the plains at Belen on our first visit, and then 21 on the second, showing superbly in the crisp morning air. Voted joint 'bird of the trip'.

#### RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Haematopus haematopus*: A few at the lake at Almaraz and others seen en route.

#### BURHINIDAE

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*: Just one, on our second visit to Belen.

#### GLAREOLIDAE

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: Seen briefly by John on two dates, but quickly vanishing.

#### CHARADRIIDAE

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: Two at the embalse (reservoir) near Cáceres.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (NL): One seen by Neil at the lake at Almaraz on our first afternoon.

#### SCOLOPACIDAE

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: A few in the Pyrenees.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: One seen briefly high in the Gredos.

#### LARIDAE

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* (NL): A couple from the bus between Zaragoza and Jaca.

#### STURNIDAE

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*: A couple at the lake at Almaraz on both visits.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*: One at the lake at Almaraz on our first afternoon.

#### PTEROCLIDAE

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*: Up to ten around a huge field near Trujillo, showing especially well in flight.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*: Around six in a huge field near Trujillo and, although distant, they showed really well in the scope, perhaps due to the clear morning air.

#### COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: A scatter of 'feral' pigeons.

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*: Small numbers throughout.

Eurasian Collared Dove: *Streptopelia decaocto*: Several on the journeys, especially around towns and villages. A relatively recent colonist in Spain, but now 'saturating' the Iberian Peninsula.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Just a few seen, including two or three in the snow at Portalet, presumably grounded migrants.

#### CUCULIDAE

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*: Two very noisy birds in the plains near Trujillo.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: Seen in small numbers.

#### STRIGIDAE

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*: We spent a while chasing one at the Hotel Rural and it led us a merry dance before we gave up in disgust. A bird in Jaca did the same, but we did at least get a flight view.

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo*: A well-grown chick seen well in the late afternoon at the traditional rock in Monfragüe.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: A pair out on the plains, sitting, as usual, on piles of stones.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*: One flushed in daylight in the woods near Jaca.

#### CAPRIMULGIDAE

Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis* (H): Heard distantly on our first attempt in Extremadura, it did not even have the decency to call on the second.

#### APODIDAE

Common Swift *Apus apus*: Common.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*: A few at the Plaza Major in Trujillo.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: Just a few, with the best looks at the Foz de Lumbier in the Pyrenees.

#### ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: One at the lakes at Almaraz.

#### MEROPIIDAE

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: Common in Extremadura, but never commonplace.

#### CORACIIDAE

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: A few on wires out on the plains near Trujillo.

#### UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: Great views of several in Extremadura.

#### PICIDAE

Iberian Green Woodpecker (Sharpe's Green Woodpecker) *Picus viridis*: A couple seen in the Gredos, but rather 'sneaky' and hard to get a decent view of a perched bird, although we had some good fly-pasts. This 'new' species looks a little like a Grey-headed Woodpecker, a species that does not occur in Spain, but which is nevertheless sometimes reported there!

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: A pair seen in flight at the old monastery near Jaca and then rather more prolonged views of a singleton on our last afternoon.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: A few in the Gredos and the Pyrenees.

#### ALAUDIDAE

Dupont's Lark *Chersophilus duponti*: Despite almost constant wheezy calling all around us, it took around 90 minutes of careful scanning before we finally found the beast on the plains near Zaragoza, and enjoyed good scope views of a calling bird.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*: Abundant in some areas of the plains, the song was almost constantly audible.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*: A few along a farm track near Belen (as we were watching the ibis).

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*: Abundant on the plains near Zaragoza.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: Scattered, especially along the roads, but also present in the *dehesa*.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*: Eventually, a singing bird found near Monfragüe, but only subtly distinct from Crested Lark.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*: Common, and one of the characteristic sounds of the *dehesa*.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: Common at higher altitudes in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

#### HIRUNDINIDAE

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*: Common, with some great views, especially at the bridges in Monfragüe.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Seen in small numbers.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*: Common in Extremadura, with some great views of perched birds in the garden of the hotel.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica*: Common, and often found in large flocks.

#### MOTACILLIDAE

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*: Just one at La Plataforma in the Gredos but common at Portalet in the Pyrenees.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] iberiae*: One of the race *iberiae*, 'Spanish Wagtail', in the Gredos; a 'split' for some.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: A good scatter, especially in the Gredos and Pyrenees.  
White Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alba*. Just small numbers seen, all of the nominate form, *alba*.

#### TROGLODYTIDAE

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: Scattered throughout but seldom seen.

#### PRUNELLIDAE

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: Abundant in the Gredos and Pyrenees; Bob's favourite?

#### TURDIDAE

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: A few in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: Commonly heard, and then great views of a singing bird at Foz de Lumbier in the Pyrenees.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: At least two in the broom scrub high in the Gredos. As usual, they lacked a white spot on the throat.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*: Very localized in Monfragüe (notably at Pena Falcon) but common in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*: Common in Extremadura, but rather local.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: Common in the Gredos and Pyrenees

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*: Good views of around three birds at Alange.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: Very good views of a male at La Plataforma in the Gredos and then several more at Portalet in the Pyrenees.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*: Several around the crags in Monfragüe and a couple in the Pyrenees.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Indeed common.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: A few in the Pyrenees.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: Several in the *dehesa* and also seen in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

#### SYLVIIDAE

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*: A few heard, and seen briefly on the second visit to the lake near Almaraz.

Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler) *Cisticola juncidis*: Several heard and a few seen.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: Eventually, good views of one or two on our second visit to the lake near Almaraz.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: Several at the lake near Almaraz.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (H): Heard only at the lake near Almaraz.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*: Great scope views of a singing bird at Foz de Lumbier.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*: A couple on a scrubby hillside in Monfragüe.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*: Several in Monfragüe.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*: Several heard rattling, but just a couple seen.

Western Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis*: Two seen well in Monfragüe, showing their hulking bodies and pale eyes.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: A few in the Gredos.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*: Several singing birds in the Pyrenees.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: Commonly heard (but relatively seldom seen) in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*: Quite common in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus brehmii*: One at Foz de Lumbier. Looks like a cross between a Common Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, with a song that is distinct from Common Chiffchaff.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: Several in the Pyrenees.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: A few in the Gredos.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*: A couple in the Gredos and common in the Pyrenees.

#### MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Several in the Pyrenees.

European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*: Around four in the Gredos, while a migrant female on the steppes near Zaragoza caused some confusion.

#### TIMALIIDAE

Beaded Reedling (Bearded Tit) *Panurus biarmicus*: A superb adult male and at least two females at the lakes near Almaraz were a surprise bonus.

#### AEGITHALIDAE

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: Very dusky in Iberia.

#### PARIDAE

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*: A pair in the Pyrenees.

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*: Seen nicely in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Common in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

European Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: Scattered throughout.

Great Tit *Parus major*: The commonest tit.

#### SITTIDAE

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: Several in Monfragüe, the Gredos and Pyrenees.

#### TICHODROMADIDAE

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: Wow! After a short wait on was found at the big rock face in the Hecho valley and, after another wait, a male appeared low down on the rock face and showed extraordinarily well. Voted joint 'bird of the trip'.

#### CERTHIIDAE

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*: Common in the *dehesa* and in the pinewoods of the Gredos and Pyrenees, but heard much more often than seen.

#### ORIOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: A couple seen on Monfragüe.

#### LANIIDAE

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*: Great views along the road in the upper Hecho valley.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*: A few on the roadsides, especially in Extremadura, with a family party at our local garage.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*: Many good views of this handsome shrike.

#### CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: Scattered sightings.

Iberian Magpie (Iberian Azure-winged Magpie) *Cyanopica cyanus*: Very common in Extremadura, with a pair breeding in the gardens of our *Hotel Rural*.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Scattered along the roadsides.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*: Good but distant views in the Hecho Valley and a couple seen at Portalet.  
Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*: Two at Castle Monfragüe and then common in the Pyrenees.  
Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Surprisingly local, and seemingly attached to rocky places.  
Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*: Scattered (all are black 'Carrion Crows' rather than grey-and-black 'Hoodies').  
Common Raven *Corvus corax*: Odd birds seen throughout the tour.

#### STURNIDAE

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*: Truly spotless.

#### PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Common.  
Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*: Very local, we had our best views in Monfragüe, where a male was displaying beside a nest.  
Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*: Great views of one on the roof of the Parador Gredos.

#### ESTRILDIDAE

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*: A couple seen on the first afternoon at Almaraz. Introduced to Spain and Portugal.

#### FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: Ubiquitous.  
European Serin *Serinus serinus*: Common, the jangly song was a constant backdrop to our explorations, especially in Monfragüe.  
Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella*: After missing them in the Gredos, we had great views of several birds in the Hecho Valley, some of them grovelling around the dustbins.  
European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: Fairly common.  
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: This delicate little finch was rather common.  
Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: Usually seen from the bus, flying along at the roadside.  
Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* (NL): Heard and seen briefly in the Gredos.  
Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*: A couple in the Pyrenees.  
Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: Superb scope views of a bird feeding unconcerned on the ground at Castle Monfragüe.

#### EMBERIZIDAE

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*: Nice views at the roadside in the Hecho valley.  
Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*: One or two at Portalet in the Pyrenees.  
Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: A few in Monfragüe and a common roadside bird in the Gredos.  
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: Just one seen in the Gredos, a singing male that vanished a little too quickly.  
Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: One or two.

## MAMMALS

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*: Half a dozen in the steppes near Zaragoza.

European Hare (Brown Hare) *Lepus europaeus* (NL): One seen in the steppes near Zaragoza.

Alpine Marmot *Marmota marmota*: Some wonderfully tame animals sitting on the rocks around Portalet.

Eurasian Red Squirrel (Red Squirrel) *Sciurus vulgaris*: A few in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: Three sightings, all from the bus (to say nothing of the Iberia Short-haired Rabbit).

Spanish Ibex *Capra pyrenaica*: Several at the Plataforma de Gredos.

Pyrenean Chamois *Rupicapra pyrenaica*: Nice groups seen in the Hecho valley and at Portalet.

## REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Ocellated Lizard *Lacerta lepida*: The big green lizard seen on the last afternoon in the Pyrenees.

## Bird of the Trip

- 1= Great Bustard
- Wallcreeper
- 3 Spanish Eagle
- 4 Little Bustard
- 5= Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
- Dupont's Lark

A total of 20 species received at least one vote.