

## Aragon and Catalunya, Spain

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In March 1999 Ian Reid conducted a reconnaissance birding trip in Extremadura at the end of an academic visit to Madrid. In May he and I then followed up with a blinding four day clean-up operation that produced a key trip report and the bench-mark itinerary for a short May visit.

Clearly hooked on Spain, Ian conducted another reccy in November 2002. This time he'd gone to the pre-Pyrenees region of Aragon in NE Spain after Lammergeier, Wallcreeper and Black Woodpecker. With the assistance of local guide Josele Saiz he'd succeeded with the first two, gripping me off with Lammergeier which I'd always believed was very hard in the Pyrenees. While Wallcreepers were still at low altitude wintering sites, March seemed a good time to follow up, just five months after my last birding in Spain.

Ian and I planned another 3-4 day weekend based at Josele's B&B in the province of Huesca on the southern edge of the Sierra de Guara, part of the pre-Pyrenees mountains. In addition to the impressive Black Woodpecker and the rare and fantastically charismatic Lammergeier other potential lifers for me were Rock Thrush and Lesser Short-toed Lark; the latter in the plains to the south. My one superb Wallcreeper in Switzerland (see 19/6/90) was well overdue for an update, especially if I could use the Coolpix and Televid successfully.

### Catalonia

March 28th

Ian met me at airport arrivals having already collected the Ford Focus and found his way to and from the first birding site just beyond the airport perimeter. We headed there immediately.

### Llobregat Delta, Barcelona Province

This tiny marsh, where the Llobregat River runs into the Mediterranean, proved to be a miniature Titchwell which was already teeming with birds and held three target lifers for Ian: Greater Flamingo, Moustached Warbler and Penduline Tit.

In warm, dry weather we birded the two hides and the reedbeds between from 15.30 to 17.00 and noted a fine haul of species:

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Little Grebe     | (10+ with several pairs courting)  |
| Cormorant        | (50+)  |
| Little Egret     | (20+)  |
| Grey Heron       | (3)  |
| Greater Flamingo | (5 standing about in the lagoon looked predominantly white with little pink in the wings and I took them to be sub-ad.s) |
| Shelduck         | (1-2 on the lagoon)  |
| Mallard          | (20+ pairs)  |
| Gadwall          | (2-3 pairs)  |

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Shoveler            | (30+)   |
| Teal                | (40+)   |
| Garganey            | (as we approached the screen before the eastern hide I noticed a cracking drake dabbling about in the shallow water at the close edge of the lagoon. The smartly scalloped, pale and stripe-faced duck was nearby. A second pair was noted across the lagoon. A nice summer duck bonus on their way north to breed)   |
| Pochard             | (2 % % were noted)  |
| Marsh Harrier       | (1 & was quartering the small reedbed across the lagoon, adjacent to the airport, a % was also noted briefly)   |
| Spotted Crake       | (while in the eastern hide Ian, looking at the reedbed and shallow bay at the end of the hide, suddenly stated that he had a crake! I raced to join him and the only other birder present, a middle aged Dutch woman, also piled in keen to see it. With Little and Baillon's joining Water Rail here on the CBG map I scanned in anticipation. When I saw the dapper grey/brown crake spangled with white spots I was hardly disappointed to announce ad. br. Spotted, ironically <i>not</i> here on the CBG map. Red base to the bill and blackish face were clear as the crake wondered whether to continue out into the open. At a range of 7-8m in bright sunshine the bird showed superbly and I cursed not having the camera as the three of us strained to look back into the reeds. Within a few minutes the crake crept back into cover flicking its long cream undertail as a final salute. This bird was probably a migrant also) |
| Coot                | (10+)   |
| Moorhen             | (c.5)   |
| Black-winged Stilt  | (40-50 were feeding all over the lagoon, flying about and generally adding an excessive hint of Titchwell)  |
| Collared Pratincole | (as we approached the eastern hide Ian suddenly announced a pratincole flying over the lagoon beyond the hide. Delighted with this bonus summering bird I congratulated Ian on a cracking find as we hurried into the hide for a better look. Here we enjoyed good views of the wonderful adult bird for the next 30 minutes as it swung back and forth feeding over the water. Chestnut underwing and white trailing edge to the secondaries, above and below were clear as I followed the beauty with bin's at 20-30m range. The characterful throat patch and breast band were clear as was the black forked tail and white rump. We eventually realized the Dutch birder hadn't picked up on the pratincole so we pointed it out, much to her delight. One of my favourite families)  |

Little Ringed Plover (5 ad.s were seen after I picked up the first skulking in grass across the lagoon)

Dunlin (1 distant bird was not aged)

Wood Sandpiper (I identified the first through a screen between the hides and two more were soon picked up. Dull yellow legs, short bill and bright super' above dark eyestripe were noted before the bird flew, whistling excitedly. Another good spring migrant on its way to northern Europe)

Common Redshank (c.10)

Spotted Redshank (Ian located the first of 2 non-br. ad.s on the lagoon)

Black-tailed Godwit (c.30 non-br. ad.s were on the far side of the lagoon, hidden by reeds when not in flight)

Common Snipe (2-3 creeping about on islets in the lagoon)

Ruff (1& was something of a surprise)

Yellow-legged Gull (100-200 mainly in flight overhead)

Little Gull (10-15 delightful ad. w. birds were fluttering to and fro low over the lagoon with the pratincole, very much like marsh terns. Their sooty underwings contrasted nicely with the rounded white primary tips)

Alpine Swift (as we approached the screen Ian picked up several Alpine Swifts overhead, his third good find in 30 minutes. 20-30 superb, hefty, white-bellied fly hunters scythed about effortlessly above the reserve)

Kingfisher (1-2 were seen scooting about low over the water)

Monk Parakeet (2-3 pairs of these pale grey-faced natives of Argentina were shrieking from palms near the reserve centre and made me wonder whether I'd just landed further south in Africa. Obviously colonising feral birds they were of some interest since 1-2 had recently been reported amongst the London Ring-neckeds and Surfbirdsnews had discussed a small colony at Borehamwood, Herts as well as in the Canaries and southern Spain)

Green Woodpecker (1 flew over reedbeds)

Barn Swallow (c.20 freshly arrived birds were feeding over the lagoon)

House Martin (Ian picked up the first of c.10 feeding with the Swallows)

Meadow Pipit (1-2 on islets in the lagoon)

White Wagtail (1-2 “ )

Robin (1-2 under conifers near the centre)

[Cetti's Warbler (1-2 singing from reedbed cover)]

Zitting Cisticola (3-4 were song-fighting near the screen and eastern hide, the bouncing flight and high pitched “tip - tip - tip” song were distinctive and 1-2 were seen perched; short, compact and stripy little warblers)

Blackcap (c.10 were calling in undergrowth between the hides, clearly moving north)

[Sardinian Warbler (the harsh rattling call of one was heard in undergrowth)]

Willow Warbler (1-2 clean green and white warblers were noted)

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Chiffchaff      | (c.30 were feeding actively in trees and scrub)   |
| Great Tit       | (2-3)   |
| Woodchat Shrike | (Ian found the only one of the trip, a smart % with dark lores and rich chestnut cap, perched motionless in scrub as we were leaving) |
| Magpie          | (5-6)   |
| Common Starling | (several hundreds were considered by Ian to be ad. w. Common rather than Spotless. I confess I didn't look at any)                    |
| Tree Sparrow    | (2-3 were nice to see as always)  |
| Goldfinch       | (c.10)  |
| [Greenfinch     | (1 heard calling)]  |
| Serin           | (2-3 tiny, bold yellow, green, black and white finches were trilling in song between perches)   |
| Reed Bunting    | (1 & was in tall reeds opposite the eastern hide)   |

We then hit the road on the three hour drive NW towards the Pyrenees in the Aragon region of Spain. Heavy rain and crawling traffic on the N2 through the hills inland of Barcelona contrasted with the summer atmosphere at Llobregat and I wondered what weather was in store for us in the "uplands".

## Aragon

**March 29th**

To our relief dawn broke clear and sunny in the village of Loporzano NE of Huesca. After a leisurely 08.00 breakfast we headed for the hills and the main target, Lammergeier.

### Vadiello Dam, Huesca Province

After stopping to check soaring Griffons along the mighty gorge running south from the dam we birded the dam region from 09.30 to 12.15. As well as being as good a site as any for soaring Lammergeier, Wallcreepers reportedly spend the winter on the cliffs in the vicinity of the dam. I hoped to get some photographs of the latter since a flying Bearded Vulture would probably be too difficult. Ian informed me that the literal translation of the bird's Spanish name was "the breaker of bones". I wanted to see this enigmatic mountain bird even more fervently.



Lammergeier (we parked opposite the small dam and started scanning for Wallcreepers and birds of prey. A small cloud of Griffons was already

spiraling around the tops of the huge columns of orange-buff sandstone, characteristic of the region, that thrust skywards next to the gorge. After just ten minutes I saw a large vulture with un-vulture-like long tail. In bin's the fabulously diagnostic orange underparts and long blackish wings and tail of a corking adult Lammergeier leapt out at me and I announced the number one target species showing superbly, already. We switched to scopes as the Lammergeier roamed about in the warming air amongst the similarly huge but shabby Griffons and dapper little Egyptian escorts. In perfect morning sunshine the black moustacial tufts drooping from black lores could be made out now and then as the bird glided side on or banked in a turn. Outstretched wings were long and slender, becoming almost pointed at the primaries. The rich pale orange under's swept back into the long wedge-shaped tail. This swept back in a long point, balancing the slim neck and head, completing the distinctive silhouette of the rare mountain vulture. As the Lammergeier soared around it banked showing all dark grey-black upperparts to the casually bowed wings. The smart orange neck and head projected forward adding an attractive colour scheme to the potent shape of wings and tail. Like the other vultures, the Lammergeier drifted behind the free vertical pillar of rock several times, appearing on the other side then circling back round. After just five busy minutes of simply watching the lifer I started to try and photograph it through the scope. This was as difficult as expected and the great bird soon started to drift south. I abandoned the attempt and watched it cruise out of sight over the arid rocky Spanish landscape. I was amazed to have had such good views of this unique bird so quickly)

- Griffon Vulture (50-100 were roaming about in the air or perching on rocky outcrops. They were impressively large but at the same time somewhat uninspiring, presumably because they were drab and common - shame)
- Egyptian Vulture (6-7 ad.s were drifting about with the big boys. Of similar form to the majestic Lammergeier with longish wedge-shaped tail and rather paddle-like wings, they were smart black and white with clear yellow faces)
- Common Buzzard (1 was seen in flight south of the gorge)
- Common Kestrel (a % fluttered over the road)
- Peregrine (1 was picked up soaring amongst a few Griffon high over the gorge below the dam as we drove up stopping to scan frequently. The sleek falcon looked like a Spitfire amongst lumbering Lancasters)
- Red-legged Partridge (1 was seen close to the road)
- Rock Dove (c.10 were on the gorge cliffs by the dam)
- Alpine Swift (c.30 crackers were feeding high over the gorge)
- Crag Martin (40-50 were seen in the gorge at all heights, a few around the dam and several in one of the small quarries by the road. When three landed to preen I set up the camera and my first shot of the bird caught its distinctive tail pattern as it preened. I hadn't realized before that the white spots were as large, white or on as many feathers)



- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| White Wagtail      | (1-2 smart pale grey mantled birds were on the road near the dam)  |
| Robin              | (1-2 beyond the dam in the scrub below the “Elefant” outcrop on which Ian had been shown his first Wallcreeper the previous November)  |
| Black Redstart     | (4-5 singing %% were seen on the cliffs and rocks around the gorge. The splash of red and black on the cliff by the dam got me going on one occasion as we tried to repeat Ian’s luck of Wallcreeper here) |
| Stonechat          | (1 pair along the road to the dam)   |
| Blue Rock Thrush   | (2-3 singing %% were noted along the gorge)  |
| Blackcap           | (1-2 calling in the scrub beyond the dam)  |
| [Sardinian Warbler | (1 rattling in the dry scrub was classic “Med”)]   |
| Goldcrest          | (2 in bushes below the road near the dam)  |
| Raven              | (2 were seen in flight over the gorge)   |
| Serin              | (4-5 were trilling in shrubs and scrub)  |

From 10.00 until 10.30 we staked out the Elefant outcrop but failed to find a Wallcreeper. From 11.00 until 11.30 we scanned the dam and cliff walls on either side but again could find no floppy crimson butterfly. We returned to the Elefant from 11.45 until 12.00 in case one had made its way round from the unseen side, but none could be found. We decided to move on concluding that perhaps spring was early and the Wallcreepers had moved higher into the Pyrenees already.

### **Loporzano**

As we drove back down to the start of the plain close to Loporzano a few species were noted:

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Black Kite     | (1 distant bird was the first of the trip)  |
| Marsh Harrier  | (the classic Black Kite confusion species was circling over fields some way off from the kite but long square tail and rather stiffer, square wings were noted) |
| Corn Bunting   | (2 were seen on “hedges” by the road)   |
| <b>Quizena</b> |   |

Close to this village at the eastern side of Huesca was a very prominent hilltop castle. Josele had told us that Rock Thrush bred here and so it had to be checked, just in case they were back early. From 13.00 to 13.30 we walked round the rather ugly, badly restored little castle in the arid, open cast quarry-like landscape and noted the following:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Griffon Vulture | (3-4 “barn doors” soaring near and far)   |
| Black Kite      | (2 soaring over the main road to Huesca)  |
| Thekla Lark     | (1-2 were singing from rocky outcrops. The song didn’t sound appreciably more melancholy than Crested Lark to my ear but shorter bill, thicker, blacker breast spotting and crest rising from the centre of the crown were noted) |
| Crag Martin     | (1 was building a nest under the long arched stone tunnel gateway to the castle)  |
| Black Redstart  | (1 % was singing from the ramparts)   |
| Linnet          | (1-2 flew over)   |

The complete lack of Rock Thrush jeopardized our “early spring” theory. If spring was not early then the other top Wallcreeper wintering site, Riglos, could still hold birds. Josele insisted April 14th was the last date on which they could be seen at low altitude so we felt compelled to give it a go. Josele had also said we would see Wallcreeper at Vadaiello Dam so we didn’t feel particularly optimistic. We then remembered Josele’s warning that after early morning at weekends there was little chance of seeing Wallcreeper at Riglos due to rock climbers “covering” the cliffs. The day was starting to drift with birdless hours stacking up.

## **Huesca**

As we drove west another summer visitor was noted:

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| White Stork | (1 was soaring low over the road to the north of the town) |
|-------------|--|

## **Riglos**

At c.14.00 we approached the staggering 300m high columns of sandstone towering above the scenic touristy village, with mounting pessimism. We walked up through the village to the small Catholic church, and gazed at the vast expanse of the Mallos de Riglos above and to the sides of us. As black rain clouds edged closer from the south we picked out tiny but noisy rock climbers all over the cliffs. At this point I subconsciously abandoned any hope of finding a Wallcreeper and looked around half heartedly to see what else was about. However, as if Michael Palin had suddenly shrieked “no-one expects the Spanish Inquisition”, the set for our sedate Spanish birding was about to be dramatically invaded. By 15.00 we had noted the following:

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Lammergeier | (at c.14.15 I was lying on my back at the foot of the cliffs to get a more comfortable view of the vultures circling almost vertically above us. As I focused my bin’s I heard Ian start to react and at that very instant an adult Lammergeier cruised into my field of view. We exclaimed simultaneously as the second cracking bird of the day drifted into the arena. At slightly greater range than the morning bird this one looked utterly immaculate. Blemish-free pale orange under’s |
|-------------|--|



sat between long, smoothly curved wings and splendid long, wedge-shaped tail as the Bearded Vulture soared out above the steep slopes to the cliffs. After just a minute or two the Lammergeier drifted off to the east, passing through like a regal celebrity, not staying for long, but pleasing the spectators by its mere presence)

- Griffon Vulture (c.50 were circling around the top of the cliffs and on thermals nearby the whole time)
- Egyptian Vulture (c.5 ad.s were circling in the throng of vultures)
- Rock Dove (c.10 were fluttering about low on the cliff above us in a loose flock)
- Crag Martin (10+ were about, as usual it seemed)
- Black Redstart (1 pair was noted in the scrub and on the base of the cliff)
- Black Wheatear (soon after we'd reached the scrub at the base of the cliff Ian noticed one smart bird on the base of the cliff. Soon another was noted and we watched the two birds fly to and from the rock)
- Sardinian Warbler (a pair was flitting about in the scrub and showing quite well on and off)
- Wallcreeper (after scanning in vain and watching the above species, especially the Lammergeier, at c.14.30 I saw a dark bird move to a knoll where the Black Wheatears had been. Ian was moving up the slope nearby as I decided to try and get a photo of a Black Wheatear. I raised my bin's but the sight of a broad black throat on a dumpy grey bird fluttering crimson wings stunned me. I blurted to Ian "Wallcreeper! A beautiful black-throated male!". He came tumbling back down the scrubby, rocky slope as I looked again with bin's at the stonking bird which was hopping up the rock face, flicking out its dazzling wings. Anxious to get some kind of record image I immediately set up the scope and camera, breathing hard and fumbling with adaptor screws and buttons in my haste. Fortunately the Wallcreeper didn't seem too shy or flighty and continued probing on the buttress of rock right at the base of *our* part of the enormous cliff. Thrilled at our luck when all had seemed to be lost I concentrated on the task and squeezed off a couple of hurried shots in case it flew. One of these caught the only wing flick of the encounter to my pleasure/frustration. The bold white spots on black primaries, ornamenting the crimson wings are visible. The wings were obvious when watching it move about on the rock but were extremely hard to capture in stills.





The Wallcreeper was making its way round the base of the cliffs at low level and soon moved out of sight. We both now started climbing up the surprisingly steep slope. Without bin's the bird was invisible, with bin's it took some picking up, even though the rock was pale brown and the bird was continually flicking out its wonderful wings. The Wallcreeper continually hopped up or along the rockface and I emerged at the edge of the next hillock just a little above the bird while Ian went higher still. The Wallcreeper was working its way through a small crevice but getting closer. I tried to track it in the Coolpix LCD but this was a recipe for insanity. Soon the Wallcreeper flew closer and I was amazed by the weak, wavering flight as the broad, rounded wings flapped erratically, exactly like a large red, black and white butterfly. It landed no more than 25m away and commenced probing and scuttling like a nuthatch. It was indeed not much larger than a Eurasian Nuthatch; surprisingly small, active and amazingly well camouflaged. While locating it directly through the scope eyepiece I noted very fine, relatively short, sharp and only slightly decurved black bill, small, almost piggy, black eye in plain grey head and short, pale grey tipped tail only just emerging from beneath broad black primaries and tertials. Most of the time the wings were folded showing crimson panels in the bases of the remiges and in wing coverts. A rose pink patch in the region of the alula may have been this or crimson showing through grey flank feathers. I continued battling to track and photograph the cracking bird as the rain clouds arrived. We were then deluged with rain as the Wallcreeper decided to pause and sit it out on a nice flat rock bang opposite me. I worked through the downpour, lining up, focusing and exposing in dull light, wiping the LCD, controls, scope objective and eyepiece with my wet hanky, then squeezing the button. Thanks to the software later, I was able to produce some quite acceptable pictures of our Wallcreeper.

The photos show the rather large feet with very long hind claws in particular. After I'd thrown my Barbour hood on the ground (very glad for the rest of it however) and abused my equipment horribly to keep it working, the rain moved away; the prime photo opportunity was over and the Wallcreeper resumed feeding. As it started to climb vertically I took a couple more.

Thereafter the Wallcreeper started to leave us and the angle became too steep to track it any higher. I'd done enough. We were both delighted)

Red-billed Chough (3-4 were flying along the face of cliffs calling as cheerily as ever. These fine birds seemed to be everywhere - which was nice)

Serin (several in the village itself as usual)

We went into the climbers' bar in the village for a celebratory beer and left the suddenly amazing site at c.15.30. Ian was now feeling sufficiently confident to strike out for the remaining montane target, Black Woodpecker, while we were on a roll.

Red Kite (2 were seen circling from the road as we drove away)

Black Kite (2-3 were noted above the cliffs as we were leaving)





## Drive from Riglos to San Juan de la Peña

A few miles north of Riglos Ian picked up what had to be an Egyptian Vulture on top of a mere 30m high pillar of roadside rock, even though he was driving. Since we were now relaxed a photo or two was worth having:

Egyptian Vulture (in fact 2 were sitting on top of the rock showing very nicely through the scope. Mean, bright yolk yellow face drawn out into fine black bill and scruffy brown marked white plumage were noted)



## San Juan de la Peña

We arrived at the escarpment-top pine woods after a tortuous drive along a tiny, winding road, at c.17.00. Consultation of both Gosney and Rose led us to start birding along the road to the SW of the strange monastery. This led through mature pines to the escarpment edge although we remained in Black Woodpecker habitat. We then worked our way round through the pines on the north side of the monastery. By 19.00 we had noted the following:

[Cuckoo

(1 was calling from the valley far below the viewpoint on the north side of the ridge)]

Black Woodpecker

(as usual Ian had come armed with recordings of the target birds so we were familiar with the loud clacking and piping notes of Black Woodpecker when one called not far from the first road. We waited on the road scanning the dense pine trunks and heavy foliage and heard a brief burst of hard tapping. After some time we were about to move on, hopeful of coming across one, when I saw a large black something bolt through a gap in the timber. Convinced that we could stalk up to it I suggested we enter the trees. With no more sound from the woodpecker we crept towards the likely region. I stopped every dozen silent steps to scan ahead but after 100 very slow

and quiet metres progress we could find nothing. The great bird had given us the slip, it clearly hadn't stopped when it had flown through. Why so secretive? We worked our way north through more mature pinewood but saw nothing. After an hour and a quarter we got back to the main road through the site and had decided to call it a day when I strung a creaking tree for tapping, to the north. We now moved into a third section of pines on the north side of the monastery. Soon we were on a wide track leading to the northern edge of the ridge. Ian seemed tired and was trudging along looking at the ground. His heavy foot-fall seemed too noisy to optimize our chance of finding the huge but shy woodpecker so I hung back letting him drift ahead. Within two minutes I heard a heavy wafting sound of powerful wing beats approaching from behind and to my right. They were quick with longer pauses than duration. Ian hadn't heard them or at least he hadn't reacted as I spun round to see a whacking great Black Woodpecker zoom over the path 6m behind me! I shouted *Ian! Ian!* but it was too late. He spun round after the big black missile had belted off through the pines. Despite being unmistakable I had been unable to note any red on the head or even the huge silver bill.

We immediately headed back towards the region of trees to the left of the track and carefully checked the region but again the woodpecker had not stopped. I couldn't believe it was simply hiding from us. At 19.00 we called a halt. Ian's confidence after the Wallcreeper had not been misplaced but it had backfired. I was pleased to have seen the unmistakable bird but frustrated with the brevity. Ian was not a happy bunny understandably)

- Great Spotted Woodpecker (1 % flew through the pines along the first road and was easily located on a trunk some way off through the trees. I couldn't understand why the huge cousin was so hard to see)
- Mistle Thrush (1 on the open grass in front of the monastery)
- Fieldfare (2-3 late wintering birds were on the grass with the Mistle)
- Blackbird (1-2 noted)
- Firecrest (Ian found 2 cracking little birds in bushes by steps down to a viewpoint on the northern side the ridge. I waited on the steps and watched the little gems come to within a few metres)
- Crested Tit (the soft purring trill was heard in the canopy by the first road. After seeing none in Scotland in 2002 I was determined to see one here. Incredibly 2 silhouetted birds flitted over the road and were lost)
- Nuthatch (2 birds kept emerging onto the first road where they hopped about on the tarmac calling just a few metres from us)

Thus my day ended with all three target species, two lifers, UTB. However, there was no question as to our mission the following day.

### March 30th

Having forgotten to set our watches for summertime our Sunday morning return visit to San Juan de la Peña was late and we feared disturbance of the woods by day-trippers. We arrived, after a very welcome distraction (see below), at 11.00. We started by blasting the woods around the carpark with Ian's Black Woodpecker CD on the car stereo and then worked the pines in reverse order to the previous night, finishing in the strip of pines south of the monastery. We then moved down the hillside to the west to try the woods near the old monastery under the cliff. Although much more open these apparently could produce Black Woodpecker also. By 13.00 we had noted the following:

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Lammergeier              | (as Ian drove up the steep winding road from the north I checked circling Griffons and saw the tell-tale long wedge and slimmer wings of my third Lammergeier. After my halloo Ian pulled over and we bundled out with bin's, tripods and scopes. This time the vulture was drifting over a wide valley below us and remained in view for 5+ minutes. Time to track it in the scope revealed the black lores with protruding moustacial and subtle black necklace swinging onto the breast from the shoulder.<br>Immediately obvious were missing remiges and retrices despite being an adult bird in spring. Although I only glimpsed it once, Ian was sure the bird had wing tags on its scapulars. If so maybe the scruffy plumage was consistent with recent captivity. Either way the lovely orange and black Lammergeier was soaring about over pinewoods in the pre-Pyrenees as free as a bird. When it had drifted away over a distant peak we continued on our quest) |
| Griffon Vulture          | (4-5 were soaring with the Lammergeier. Others over the escarpments near and far)  |
| Egyptian Vulture         | (Ian found 2 perched on an outcrop above the lower woods and they soon indulged in a little copulation)  |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | (3-4 were noted to our frustration)  |
| Short-toed Treecreeper   | (1 was picked up on call (not specifically) and 2-3 were seen in a loose flock)  |
| Jay                      | (2 noted)  |
| Red Squirrel             | (1 showed very close to the car as we played the CD)   |

After a total of four hours at the site I had one untickable and one 2s. view of Black Woodpecker. Ian had still seen nothing.

### Oroel

Josele had suggested this site if San Juan de la Peña failed since “*a pair*” inhabited the pine forests beyond the visitor centre! We arrived at 14.00 to find that the pine forests comprised a magnificent carpet of conifers over undulating bilberry covered open floor and rising up steep slopes towards the sheer cliffs of the enormous Oroel rock outcrop. The habitat looked perfect for Capercaillie and the, thankfully unrequired, task of searching for them looked even more impossible than for the apparently ultra-hard Black Woodpecker.

Again we started with the CD on the car stereo. We stopped along the quiet road through the beautiful forest, opened all the doors and played the calls for five minutes. After no response we drove on. By 15.30 we had noted the following:

#### Black Woodpecker

(after five minutes of silence at the first stop we tried again. After nothing at the second stop we drove on and tried again. With silence here I finally became convinced we would find no more Black Woodpeckers. That was the cue for the irony meister of birding fate to kick into action. I started eating a sandwich while Ian played the CD again. We listened with anticipation draining to zero when clear clacking notes answered the CD from some way off in the forest! Suddenly galvanized into action we repeated the playback. Nothing - had we imagined it? We repeated the playback and a real Black Woodpecker answered. We did it again, the bird answered, it was coming in! We strained to see through the trees but continued to excite or antagonize the territory owner with the CD. Suddenly a black missile appeared in a gap below us and I shouted “there it is” as I raised my bin’s to a fantastic Black Woodpecker flying left to right in front of us. In a flash it was gone but I had seen the silvery white bill. However, Ian had not managed to get his bin’s on it and I hoped the bird would come in closer and perch in view. We played the CD again, concentrating on the calls the real bird was making. A few minutes later the woodpecker flew back the way it had come and this time we both got binoculars on it. Long, full wings were flapped powerfully and deeply and the bird swept them down hard to rise up over a conifer tip that was in its path. Arched back and silver bill were noted as the cracker carried out its reconnaissance flight, but again I could see no red on its crown.

To our surprise the woodpecker refused to come closer having presumably easily sussed us and our Ford Focus. However, a second bird had started calling down the road ahead of us and we set off after it leaving the car. Still nothing could be seen so Ian fetched the car while I scanned the forest. When the CD arrived not only did two Black Woodpeckers respond (the first had slipped back again unseen) but another ‘pecker uttered a shrill call like Lesser Spotted from mature pine canopy behind us. Meanwhile the Blacks were dashing about beyond large pines and we could see nothing. Eventually they started calling from fixed positions and we



approached extremely cautiously. Down a narrow footpath we got close and I hoped to find one perched on a huge pine trunk; but suddenly they called from further away and that was that. A total of six hours for six seconds viewing was one of my worst ratios ever)

woodpecker sp.

(a bird answered the CD with a shrill Lesser Spotted-like call and eventually bombed out over the road and was clearly a mid-sized spotted woodpecker, possibly Middle Spotted. Later Josele said that neither Middle nor Lesser Spotted occurred here so this would have been a very good find had we nailed it!)

Coal Tit

(plenty calling and flitting about)

Crested Tit

(in the mature pine forest after the woodpeckers, a couple started purring near the road. I was determined to *see* one and followed movement until the black and white crest, ear covert ring and black throat were finally noted - they did still exist!)

Nuthatch

(many)

Short-toed Treecreeper

(1 noted near the woodpeckers)

Bullfinch

(1 flew over the road near the visitor centre)

At last we were free to leave Black Woodpecker and move on to lesser targets. Ian wanted to tick off Alpine Chough and look for Snow Finch so we decided to use the rest of the Sunday by driving into the Pyrenees proper.

### **Astún, Pyrenees**

We decided that the smallest, most northern of the Spanish ski resorts in the western part of the range would be the easiest to work and headed straight there. The small, compact, modern resort clung to the side of a snow covered corrie and reminded me of Solynieve in the Sierra Nevada (Andalucia) in its garish lack of sympathy with the ancient, wild setting. From 16.15 to 17.00 we noted the following around the resort under a dull grey sky:

Red Kite

(1 lovely bird drifted around the resort looking rather out of place)

Water Pipit

(2 fine br. pl. birds were found grubbing about on snow melting over a mound of bulldozed earth. The pale grey head and delicate salmon pink breast were surprisingly obvious; the first birds I'd seen in this plumage. The grey head with broad dull white supercilium merged into pale, unmarked brown mantle and without breast streaks or malar stripes made the pipit look extremely distinctive. I was pleased to see them high in European mountains, their breeding habitat, in breeding plumage)

Meadow Pipit

(2-3 streaky rich brown birds were also noted)

Black Redstart

(the inevitable singing % was on top of one of the hotels)

Alpine Chough

(as we drove up 7 smallish black crows were circling low over the carpark. We jumped out and raised our bin's to the Alpine Choughs. The charming mountain crows spiraled higher and higher away from us, climbing up the side of the corrie until they were just

specks drifting over the snow covered ridge high above. Ian had noted the short yellow bill and paler grey remiges contrasting with black underwing coverts and body. Annoyingly I later noted 2 more on posts at the bottom of a ski run just as they were flying off, denying me any chance of photographing them. If only I'd seen them earlier!

Yellowhammer (1 calling % seemed even more out of place than the kite)

Having ticked off the chough and failed to get onto the high tops as the chair lifts were closing, we headed straight back down to the pre-Pyrenees - twitchers that we are!

### **Salto de Roldan, Huesca**

Our way back to the B&B took us past this dramatic rocky vantage point that is visible from miles around. It comprises two enormous pillars of rock which stand either side of a steep gorge as it flows out onto the plain below the pre-Pyrenees. The pillars are steep and high enough to provide a favourite roosting site for Bonelli's and Golden Eagles and Griffon Vultures while the rocky, scrub-covered terrain nearby holds Rock Thrush in the breeding season. I was keen to try for the latter just in case.

We arrived to find no-one else present at the well known beauty spot and from 18.00 until 19.30 we scanned with scopes in the evening sunshine.

Lammergeier (as we scoped a Golden Eagle perched high on a rock pinnacle in the fading sunshine, an adult Lammergeier sailed behind it in the clear blue sky! For a moment we had adult Golden Eagle and Lammergeier in the same scope view before we both started following the vulture.

The Lammergeier drifted about for only a minute or two before turning and wandering back behind the rocky ridge from which it had emerged. The hope of finding one perched high on a ledge or pinnacle kept us scanning but the obliging yet elusive bird left us wanting more)

Griffon Vulture (20+ sailing about very near and far, several starting to alight on the rock pillars to roost)

Egyptian Vulture (7-8 were drifting about the pillars and showing nicely)

Golden Eagle (at c.18.30 Ian stopped his scope on a raptor perched a very long way off on a rock pinnacle still in sunshine. I couldn't find what he was onto in my scope and looked through his as he concluded that it was a Golden Eagle. I immediately agreed as I noted the broad shoulders tapering to slim, medium length tail and dark brown upperpart plumage - a very good find. For the next 15-20 minutes I photographed the perched Golden at a crazy range of at least 1½ miles, possibly 2. Occasionally sun lit up the great dark eagle allowing the best shots to be squeezed out of the equipment. Incredibly the "golden" nape and pale bill and gape were visible with dark eye between, along with the rather obvious pale brown greater coverts. The "king of the birds" was casually looking around what must have been a staggering view from its vantage point. The eagle was clearly settled for the night and was still there when we left at 19.30)

- Common Kestrel (1 was noted over the scrub nearby)  
 Black Redstart (the inevitable singing %% were noted on the scrubby slope below us)  
 Blackbird (1-2 were checked for Rock Thrush credentials)  
 Red-billed Chough (birds could be heard calling from somewhere beneath us as we looked over the sheer escarpment down to the plain on the southern side of the outcrop. It was some time before we worked out that these were echoes coming up at us and the actual birds were approaching from far off over the plain to the south. Gradually the little black crows could be made out as they trundled high in the air chatting to each other. Soon a clattering mass could be heard and a flock of 40+ birds came in from the SW. The choughs were clearly returning to the Salto de Roldan to roost. At 18.30 5-6 choughs gathered on the ramparts of an old stone building right on the top of the rock outcrop and I took a few near-silhouetted photos. As they settled to roost the choughs were tumbling about against the sheer cliffs, utterly at home)  
 Raven (2 joined the throng of cliff face birds)

### **Huesca-Loporzano**

As we left the N240 east of Huesca to drive up to Loporzano another raptor dashed onto the trip list.

- Merlin (1 flew low and fast over the road in front of us. Josele later confirmed that they winter in the region quite commonly. Spain seems to have everything except Black Grouse and seabirds!)  
 Corn Bunting (1 by the roadside. This seemed to be the best place to see this species)

### **Loporzano Cemetery**

Josele had told us that one or two Eagle Owls inhabited the rocky ravine next to the village cemetery and that they would start calling towards dusk. Having seen only large fledglings before (see 13/5/99) I was willing to end the day with a big-eared adult Bubo. We found the charming, characteristically walled cemetery containing cypruses at 20.00. However I was daunted to see that the ravine was a wide and deep valley running for several miles. We scanned ledges, rocks and crevices near and far for ten minutes until Ian was volunteered to fetch beer and Josele (if he was willing) from the B&B. He got back as dusk was looming at c.20.30 and by 20.45 we had noted the following:

[Eurasian Eagle Owl] (at c.20.30 a single low “hoo” started to creep up from the darkening ravine. At first we weren’t sure what we were hearing, if anything, but the soft persistent “hoo.....hoo.....hoo” was unmistakable, if extremely understated for such a formidable predator. The pause between hoots lasted c.10s. making the call almost subliminal. As we stood on the edge of the ravine, in the gathering dark, with the cemetery just behind us we found ourselves in yet another one of those

bizarre circumstances which only birders experience. After a while a hoot seemed to be coming from a second spot further up the ravine)]

Thekla Lark (1 was singing not far from our vantage point)  
Black Wheatear (Ian found 1 hopping between boulders far below us)

By 20.45 it was almost dark, there would be no seeing an Eagle Owl now so we headed back after a long and ultimately productive day.

### Vadiello Dam

March 31st

With the targets all UTB the plan was to head back towards Barcelona via the plains looking for larks, sandgrouse and Little Bustard. Since we were starting close to one of the best Lammergeier and Wallcreeper sites we thought it worth a try for photos. From 09.30 to 10.30 we birded around the dam, scanning the nearby pillar of rock and walked up to the "Elefant", noting the following:

Great Cormorant (1 flew off from the reservoir)  
Griffon Vulture (20-30 as usual. To prove that I wouldn't have been able to photograph a soaring Lammergeier I tried on the Griffons circling over the pillar - and virtually succeeded - to my frustration)  
Egyptian Vulture (5-6 as before)  
Black Kite (2 were soaring about above the pillar with vultures and choughs)  
Common Kestrel (1 % was noted over the scrubby hillsides during the drive back down)  
Rock Dove (4-5 around the dam)  
Hoopoe (I picked up 1 flying high over the narrow gorge by the dam. It landed high on the cliff opposite and raised its crest before bounding off again)  
Crag Martin (3-4 around the dam)  
House Martin (2 around the dam had just returned to their breeding site)  
Blue Rock Thrush (1 was singing from a pylon near the dam)  
Sardinian Warbler (1 % was singing in the scrub below The "Elefant" and showed well occasionally. I was watching this while Ian went ahead up to the "Elefant")  
Red-billed Chough (2 were circling above the pillar with the raptors)  
Cirl Bunting (2 % % were seen closely by the road below the dam)

While I was watching the Sardinian Ian went up to check the "Elefant" for a Wallcreeper. Instead he shouted back down that a Lammergeier had appeared over a ridge beyond. By the time I'd got up there it had drifted off again, faster than usual. Of course the shouting would have flushed any Wallcreeper which may have been present so we returned to the car. It was my turn to feel empty-handed.

### Cuarte, SW Huesca

We arrived at the small lake at the start of the plains at 11.15, hoping to see the breeding Penduline Tits described by Josele. By 11.45 we had noted the following:

Great Crested Grebe (1+ were on the lake)

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Coot             | (5-10)   |
| Crested Lark     | (2-3 were flying about the sandy tracks between the chicken farms and lake. One sang from the roof of a chicken shed)                |
| [Cetti's Warbler | (1 singing in the area of poplars standing in the shallows at one end of the lake that should have held the nesting Penduline Tits)] |
| Sedge Warbler    | (1 feeding low in reeds at the water's edge)   |
| Chiffchaff       | (1+ noted)   |
| Corn Bunting     | (1 was singing in a nearby field)  |

### **Drive to Los Monegros**

We then drove from Huesca towards an area on the plains called Los Monegros which lay between Zaragoza to the west and Lierda to the east. On the drive SE we noted a few good birds from 11.45 to 12.40:

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| White Stork       | (a few birds were seen soaring and small colonies were noted on rooftops)   |
| Red Kite          | (1-2)   |
| Black Kite        | (3-4)   |
| Marsh Harrier     | (1 circling not far from the Monties)   |
| Montagu's Harrier | (a raptor circling low over the road ahead of us looked like a kite until we got close enough to see the slender wings and pale under's of a lovely % . We dived out of the car as I parked on the verge and watched the lovely mature bird drift away over the flat arable land, showing dark grey upperwing coverts contrasting with pale grey remiges) |
| Alpine Swift      | (5-6 were feeding over farm buildings amongst the wide flat arable land hosting the harriers)   |

### **Los Monegros**

The plains in a triangle between Ontiñena, Candasnos and Ballabar were higher than the surrounding land and comprised a fine expanse of arid sandy, stony fields with intermingled arable areas, deserted terra cotta roofed fincas scattered liberally and a large dusty basin on the southern side that held water in the winter. Although shown on the map, we could find no name for this lake. We started driving south from Ontiñena towards Candasnos, stopping to scan and listen at c.12.40. We turned east towards Ballabar and birded the drying up lake for an hour before retracing our steps almost back to Ontiñena and then motoring south then east at 18.10 for Barcelona and a night on the town. Targets were both sandgrouse and Little Bustard generally and Lesser Short-toed Lark at the lake. In 5½ hours we noted the following:

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Red Kite       | (2 distant birds were circling over the wide fields around the Lesser Kestrels)  |
| Common Kestrel | (1-2 % % were noted although Lesser Kestrel was more in evidence - at last)  |
| Lesser Kestrel | (as we drove south on the first leg I was scanning for sandgrouse when I noticed 3-4 falcons drifting about over an old terra cotta roofed finca standing in the expansive fields. The number of birds plus the habitat had to |

make them Lesser Kestrels so we retraced our steps, stopping on the road c.250m from the finca. For the next 15 minutes we watched 4 pairs of the lovely little falcons circling around near and far catching insects and eating them on the wing. Several birds dropped onto the terra cotta tiles and despite the heat haze I trained the scope and camera on them. At least two pairs were crawling under the tiles to nest sites, preening or even mating at their quiet little colony. Grey greater upperwing coverts, spotless rufous upper's and blue grey rounded head on the % % were obvious.



Red-legged Partridge  
[Quail

Little Bustard

The && looked clean white beneath but none of the very subtle features could be guessed at. We drove down a nearby track and had lunch not far from another finca where a lone pair of Lesser Kestrels was setting up home. Others were noted elsewhere on the plains)

(c.3 were noted scuttling off the road)

(1 was singing from fairly high grass at the first stop. I strolled a little way in but nothing was seen of the elusive tiny gamebird. I hadn't *seen* a Quail since finding the first for Landguard Point in Suffolk (see 23/5/94)]

(hours of scanning and listening for the amazingly understated yet far-carrying raspberry display call produced nothing until we drove down a long rough track on the east side of the triangle. Scanning and listening far from the "main" road eventually resulted in the tiny farting sound of a displaying Little Bustard. We were by now amongst rich, deep meadow grass, flowers and cowslip, perfect habitat. We listened intently and after some time the quiet sound again drifted over the Spanish plains to us. We drove on down the track and stopped to listen. After some time the call came again. With such intermittent bursts of such short duration the ventriloqual effect was hard to overcome so we walked on down the track. Listening with cupped ears implied that the bustard was between 100-200m from us in tall grass and yellow



flowers. After some dallying I decided to cut along the edge of the field. Ian followed and after 75-100m a bustard suddenly flew up some way ahead of us, followed by a second. With bin's we watched the pair of Little Bustards fly away on large, rapidly flapped black and white wings. They didn't stop, flying on over the next wide field and disappearing over the hill. That was that, on the trip list but rather frustrating. We were surprised by the scarcity and difficulty compared with Extremadura)

Black-winged Stilt

(Ian went off towards the remnant lake at the lark site and pointed out a couple of stilts. I looked at them briefly)

Stone Curlew

(as we were preparing to leave the lake a strong but plaintive plover-like mewing call was heard. Sounding like Curlew I quickly decided it had to be a Stone Curlew, even though I was largely unfamiliar with the sound. I scanned and after a minute or two located the strange gawky wader with big yellow eyes and wing bars, standing still on the arid ground c. 250m away. A second bird replied to the first from stony fields to the west but this bird remained out of sight)

Little Owl

(1 was picked up on a crumbling stone finca by the road as we drove past. We reversed and watched it fly to the bank beyond where it sat on the sandy ground blending in like a Burrowing Owl)

Hoopoe

(4-5 were noted; 1 pair flew up by the roadside and 1 landed on a boulder nearby where it perched in full view, somehow believing its pink crest and black and white striped body made it hard to see)

[Green Woodpecker  
Crested Lark

(1 was calling near the lake)]

(the long crested larks were flying up from the ground to stone walls or floating over scrub to drop down to the rocky earth, everywhere)

Lesser Short-toed Lark

(we drove down the stony track to the lake which was a good site for Lesser Short-toed. We parked at the southern edge of the wide arid basin at c.15.30. As we got out of the car one, then two, then a couple more small larks flew up from an open rocky area uttering a short dry call that fitted the CBG description of LST. However the small passerines flew off over the scrub for c.100m before dropping back into the sparse but infuriatingly sufficient ground cover. I approached scanning ahead as carefully as I could but could see nothing until a lark sprang into the air and flew on again. All the larks were flushed in this way. After a few attempts they had all flown back into a wide area of endless ground vegetation or flown on towards the deeper vegetation by what was left of the lake. Ian and I then split up as visions of the Dupont's Lark task (see 16/5/99) crept up on us. Ian moved towards the lake while I settled down to the task of seeing and identifying these larks which had to be Lesser Short-toed. As I moved out across the basin I realized that between 1 and 4 larks were song-fighting overhead most

of the time. This was also distinctive; the small, squarish tailed larks were fluttering about on wings pumped rapidly in short bursts, moving in wide, ragged circles c.30m up and uttering a constant tinkling of buzzing and trilling notes. The buzzing phrase was very reminiscent of Sand Martin. I watched one bird overhead when breast streaking and paler belly were noted. In fact I had seen and heard enough to identify the birds as Lesser Short-toed but I wanted to see the bird clearly before referring to CBG in the car. After a very hot, tiring and frustrating 30-40 minutes of stalking, flushing and waiting I followed a singing lark until it came back down to earth. To my good fortune it came down close to the open track and I quickly stalked towards the spot and scanned the relatively open terrain. Sure enough the lark moved into my field of view and paused, showing well streaked ear coverts, dark eyestripe below pale supercilium, and thin dark malar stripe. It then scuttled forward. I scanned ahead and caught it again. Soon it stood up on a small rock to take a look around and I then saw neatly streaked breast stopping abruptly above clean white belly and flanks.

Finely marked wing coverts ran into long tertials with rather long, slim dark primaries protruding beyond them. Shortish square tail sported clear white outer tail feathers. In the next instant the Lesser Short-toed Lark had run forward and disappeared into the usual thicker vegetation. When I later looked at CBG I realised I'd seen all I'd needed to. They were actually quite obvious when seen well, let alone watched and heard song flying overhead. As we drove back down the track to the road Ian suggested that we scan the flat stony ground between the lake and the road. I stopped and we raised our bin's, immediately finding a small foraging flock of Calandra Larks creeping about on the ground; we had by luck stopped at exactly the right spot. As we watched, a small lark with streaked face and breast moved through amongst the chunky Calandras - a Lesser Short-toed! At that instant the larks all sprang up and flew behind the car. I reversed 50m and we started scanning again. A testing 10-15 minutes of careful checking Calandra after Calandra from the car paid off when we both latched onto the Lesser Short-toed simultaneously. The small, compact streaked lark trundled over stones and behind tufts of vegetation before we lost it. A total of 7-10 Lesser Short-toeds was estimated at the site. My third and final lifer of the trip, the ultimate LBJ but very satisfying)

Calandra Lark

(from the first stop the large, long-winged larks were much in evidence, singing in wandering song flight high overhead or feeding on rough ground. From beneath the long wings with black underwing and white trailing edge were notable. As birds flew up from the ground the length of the wings made them appear rather languid.

One bird near the road at an early stop was stalked along the edge of a field and photographed as it scuttled away from me, the black neck patch and hefty bill being clearly visible even through heat haze and vegetation.

3 Calandras were seen at the lake with 6-7 in the feeding flock along the track containing the last Lesser Short-toed. 20+ were noted elsewhere. A pleasing, typical bird of the plains)

Barn Swallow

(1-2 had returned to the plains)Meadow Pipit  
(c.10 at the lake added to the fun of

searching through streaked terrestrial passerines)

Black-eared Wheatear

(4 cracking white throated %% were noted along the road. The first bounded off to a hedge where I stalked and photographed it. The combination of black, white and golden brown made them extremely obvious and attractive; another good typical and hoped for species here)

Spectacled Warbler

(as we approached the second finca hosting a pair of Lesser Kestrels a harsh rattling sylvia song was heard near the track. A quick scan located a dapper % Spectacled on top of a bush. The dark mask contrasting with white throat and rufous wings made it unmistakable. After singing 10-15m from us for 10 minutes, allowing photos despite its habit of keeping vegetation between us, it moved to a hedge on a bank some way off from where it could still be heard singing clearly)



Red-billed Chough

(at the first stop the cheerful call could be heard distantly and it took some time to locate the author; 2 birds were circling around very high up for no obvious reason. A flock of 25 was noted at another stop and 1-2 more were in the vicinity of the Lesser Kestrels' fincas)

Jackdaw

(1-2 were at the Lesser Kestrels' finca, possibly also nesting there)

Linnet

(several noted at the lake)

Goldfinch

(a common passerine in the seed rich habitat)

Corn Bunting

(birds were singing everywhere)

## Barcelona, Barcelona Province

After finding a hotel, showering and changing Ian and I treated ourselves to a night in the city at the end of the weekend.

### April 1st

The next morning Ian navigated as I drove us through the city towards the airport and the delta reserve.

Alpine Swift (2-3 were zipping about low over the streets)

### Llobregat Delta

From 11.00 to 12.45 we birded the delta reserve next to the airport before our early afternoon flights home. Two new trip species were noted and it was a pleasantly easy way to end the trip:

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Little Grebe       | (3-4 pairs)  |
| Cormorant          | (c.15)   |
| Night Heron        | (2 ad.s were picked up by Ian as they flew from Willows)   |
| Little Egret       | (15-20)  |
| Grey Heron         | (c.10)   |
| Greater Flamingo   | (6 ad. and 2 imm. birds on the lagoon)   |
| Mallard            | (small numbers)  |
| Shoveler           | ( “ )  |
| Teal               | (1-2)  |
| Garganey           | (1 drake was seen briefly)   |
| Marsh Harrier      | (1 & hunting over the reeds)   |
| Moorhen            | (small numbers)  |
| Coot               | ( “ )  |
| Purple Swamphen    | (I picked up one skulking about in the reedbed across the lagoon from the hide. Scoping the bird revealed a nest hidden in the reeds and as the bird sat back down it disappeared) |
| Black-winged Stilt | (40+; a couple came very close to the hide allowing some nice photos)  |



|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Collared Pratincole | (presumably the same bird as a few days earlier was seen in flight very briefly as we approached the hide but surprisingly then disappeared)   |
| Common Redshank     | (1)  |
| Greenshank          | (2)  |
| Common Snipe        | (1 was feeding very close to the hide but denied a decent photo by remaining behind vegetation then quickly moving out of sight)   |
| Black-headed Gull   | (<10 ad.w. birds seemed late moulting)   |
| Little Gull         | (3-4 ad. w. birds were feeding over the lagoon, also late moulting)  |
| Monk Parakeet       | (the tiny colony near the visitor centre was as noisy as usual)  |
| Alpine Swift        | (c.30 were feeding energetically over the reserve)   |
| [Green Woodpecker   | (2 calling from trees nearby)]   |
| Water Pipit         | (1 fine ad. s. was watched feeding close to the end of the main hide. Showing the same strange, almost clashing combination of blue-grey head, sandy upper's and salmon pink tinged breast as the mountain birds, the pipit quickly moved on again denying me the chance of a decent shot) |
| Blue-headed Wagtail | (2-3 ad. s. birds close to the hide were very nice to see)   |
| Blackcap            | (2-3 were noted in the bushes between the hides)   |
| Zitting Cisticola   | (1-2 were singing as before)   |
| Cetti's Warbler     | (1 showed briefly amongst reeds between the hides)   |
| Chiffchaff          | (20-30 were feeding actively in the shrubbery between the hides)   |
| [Willow Warbler     | (1-2 singing remained unseen)]   |
| Serin               | (several)  |
| Reed Bunting        | (Ian located 1 % in reeds from the main hide)  |

A walk to the beach then failed to produce a Kentish Plover (which breed in the roped off area) during a 30 minute search in hot conditions. I walked back to the car to start packing my rucksack and Ian returned 20 minutes later having walked the length of the roped area after his lifer, to no avail.

We then drove to the airport to drop the car and get our flights home. It hadn't been the same awsome bird-filled weekend as the Extremadura trip but we'd seen a good selection, with a couple of cracking birds and had the essential laugh.

### Summary

|                           |                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Little Grebe              | Llobregat Delta      |
| Great Crested Grebe       | Cuarte               |
| Great Cormorant           | Llobregat Delta      |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | Llobregat Delta      |
| Little Egret              | Llobregat Delta      |
| Grey Heron                | Llobregat Delta      |
| White Stork               | Huesca, Los Monegros |
| Greater Flamingo          | Llobregat Delta      |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Shelduck                               | Llobregat Delta  |
| Mallard                                | Llobregat Delta  |
| Gadwall                                | Llobregat Delta  |
| Shoveler                               | Llobregat Delta  |
| Teal                                   | Llobregat Delta  |
| Garganey                               | Llobregat Delta  |
| Pochard                                | Llobregat Delta  |
| Black Kite                             | Loporzano, Quizena, Riglos, Vadiello Dam, Los Monegros     |
| Red Kite                               | Riglos, Astún, Los Monegros                                |
| <b>Lammergeier</b>                     | Vadiello Dam, Riglos, San Juan de la Peña, Salto de Roldan |
| Egyptian Vulture                       | Vadiello Dam, Riglos, San Juan de la Peña, Salto de Roldan |
| Griffon Vulture                        | Vadiello Dam, Riglos, San Juan de la Peña, Salto de Roldan |
| Marsh Harrier                          | Llobregat Delta, Loporzano, Los Monegros                   |
| Montagu's Harrier                      | Los Monegros   |
| Common Buzzard                         | Vadiello Dam   |
| Golden Eagle                           | Salto de Roldan  |
| Lesser Kestrel                         | Los Monegros   |
| Common Kestrel                         | Vadiello Dam, Salto de Roldan, Los Monegros                |
| Merlin                                 | Loporzano  |
| Peregrine                              | Vadiello Dam   |
| Red-legged Partridge<br>[Common Quail] | Vadiello Dam, Los Monegros<br>Los Monegros                 |
| Spotted Crake                          | Llobregat Delta  |
| Coot                                   | Llobregat Delta, Cuarte                                    |
| Moorhen                                | Llobregat Delta  |
| Purple Swamphen                        | Llobregat Delta  |
| Little Bustard                         | Los Monegros   |
| Black-winged Stilt                     | Llobregat Delta, Los Monegros                              |
| Stone Curlew                           | Los Monegros   |
| Collared Pratincole                    | Llobregat Delta  |
| Little Ringed Plover                   | Llobregat Delta  |
| Dunlin                                 | Llobregat Delta  |
| Spotted Redshank                       | Llobregat Delta  |
| Common Redshank                        | Llobregat Delta  |
| Greenshank                             | Llobregat Delta  |
| Wood Sandpiper                         | Llobregat Delta  |
| Black-tailed Godwit                    | Llobregat Delta  |
| Common Snipe                           | Llobregat Delta  |
| Ruff                                   | Llobregat Delta  |
| Little Gull                            | Llobregat Delta  |
| Black-headed Gull                      | Llobregat Delta  |



|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Yellow-legged Gull            | Llobregat Delta   |
| Rock Dove                     | Vadiello Dam, Riglos                                      |
| Monk Parakeet                 | Llobregat Delta   |
| [Common Cuckoo]               | San Juan de la Peña                                       |
| [Eurasian Eagle Owl]          | Loporzano   |
| Little Owl                    | Los Monegros  |
| Alpine Swift                  | Llobregat Delta, Vadiello Dam, Los Monegros,<br>Barcelona |
| Kingfisher                    | Llobregat Delta   |
| Hoopoe                        | Vadiello Dam, Los Monegros                                |
| Green Woodpecker              | Llobregat Delta, Los Monegros                             |
| <b>Black Woodpecker</b>       | San Juan de la Peña, Oroel                                |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker      | San Juan de la Peña                                       |
| Calandra Lark                 | Los Monegros  |
| <b>Lesser Short-toed Lark</b> | Los Monegros  |
| Crested Lark                  | Cuarte, Los Monegros                                      |
| Thekla Lark                   | Quizena, Loporzano  |
| Crag Martin                   | Vadiello Dam, Quizena, Riglos                             |
| Barn Swallow                  | Llobregat Delta, Los Monegros                             |
| House Martin                  | Llobregat Delta, Vadiello Dam                             |
| Meadow Pipit                  | Llobregat Delta, Astún, Los Monegros                      |
| Water Pipit                   | Astún, Llobregat Delta                                    |
| Blue-headed Wagtail           | Llobregat Delta   |
| White Wagtail                 | Llobregat Delta, Vadiello Dam                             |
| Robin                         | Llobregat Delta, Vadiello Dam                             |
| Black Redstart                | Vadiello Dam, Quizena, Riglos, Astún, Salto de Roldan     |
| Stonechat                     | Vadiello Dam  |
| Black-eared Wheatear          | Los Monegros  |
| Black Wheatear                | Riglos, Loporzano   |
| Blue Rock Thrush              | Vadiello Dam  |
| Blackbird                     | San Juan de la Peña, Salto de Roldan                      |
| Fieldfare                     | San Juan de la Peña                                       |
| Mistle Thrush                 | San Juan de la Peña                                       |
| [Cetti's Warbler]             | Llobregat Delta, Cuarte                                   |
| Zitting Cisticola             | Llobregat Delta   |
| Sedge Warbler                 | Cuarte  |

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Blackcap               | Llobregat Delta, Vadiello Dam                       |
| Spectacled Warbler     | Los Monegros  |
| Sardinian Warbler      | Vadiello Dam, Riglos                                |
| Willow Warbler         | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Chiffchaff             | Llobregat Delta, Cuarte                             |
| Willow Warbler         | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Goldcrest              | Vadiello Dam  |
| Firecrest              | San Juan de la Peña                                 |
| Crested Tit            | San Juan de la Peña, Oroel                          |
| Coal Tit               | Oroel   |
| Great Tit              | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Eurasian Nuthatch      | San Juan de la Peña, Oroel                          |
| Wallcreeper            | Riglos  |
| Short-toed Treecreeper | San Juan de la Peña, Oroel                          |
| Woodchat Shrike        | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Eurasian Jay           | San Juan de la Peña                                 |
| Magpie                 | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Alpine Chough          | Astún   |
| Red-billed Chough      | Riglos, Salto de Roldan, Vadiello Dam, Los Monegros |
| Jackdaw                | Los Monegros  |
| Raven                  | Vadiello Dam, Salto de Roldan                       |
| Starling               | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Tree Sparrow           | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Serin                  | Llobregat Delta, Vadiello Dam, Riglos               |
| Goldfinch              | Llobregat Delta, Los Monegros                       |
| [Greenfinch]           | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Linnet                 | Quizena, Los Monegros                               |
| Bullfinch              | Oroel   |
| Yellowhammer           | Astún   |
| Cirl Bunting           | Vadiello Dam  |
| Reed Bunting           | Llobregat Delta                                     |
| Corn Bunting           | Loporzano, Cuarte, Los Monegros                     |

No. species: 115

including:

**No. lifers: 3**

[heard only]: 5