



SOUTHERN SPAIN (Andalucia and Extremadura)

May 9 - 23, 2005

Trip Report by Adrian Binns

Day 1 / Monday May 9 – Rio Heneres; Quer Plains (Quadalajara)

Once the last of us had cleared customs in Madrid, our local guide Santi meet us in front of the van rental counter and by late morning we were on our way to check into our hotel, only a short distance from the airport. Being in town, it was no surprise that the first birds we came across were Common Swifts at the airport and a White Stork on a nest on the belltower in the zocalo.

Jim lost half a tooth on the journey over the Atlantic, so Santi arrange for him to visit the dentist after he dropped us off at the Rio Heneres, a river that flowed between a sandstone escarpment and agricultural fields consisting mainly of peas. Red Kite, Jackdaws and Red-billed Choughs were immediately seen over the escarpment and the target bird, a pair of Eagle Owl chicks were soon located in a small cave on the escarpment. A light morph Booted Eagle later gave us great looks as it flew over the river and was joined by a Common Kestrel. Birds were singing throughout the riparian vegetation but proved very difficult to locate. We had our picnic lunch watching the eagle owls while the 'cotton' from the Poplar trees reigned all over the area. Eventually a pair of Nightingales showed themselves and Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Serin all put in an appearance, but the warblers - Great Reed, Melodious and Cetti's along with Penduline Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper and Water Rail never showed. Santi and Jim returned sooner than we expected, but the news was not good – the dentist had left early, it was siesta time! We were treated to excellent perched views of Bee-eaters, their gaudy colors simply stunning and had a Scops Owl call numerous times while we patiently waiting for warblers. On the way out Eurasian Tree Sparrows, Magpie's and a Linnet showed well. In the same location on the drive in we had a female Woodchat Shrike.

From here we headed 15 minutes north to the Quer Plains near Quadalajara, where Woodpigeons, Turtle Doves and a Tree Pipit were seen in the small copse between the agricultural fields, these consisting mainly of barley interspersed with fallow fields and cover crops. As impressive a sight as you'll ever see is the large Great Bustard in flight with its white wing patches very evident during its slow lumbering flight. Another one soon followed and then one landed amongst 6 females – what a size difference. A pair of Montagu Harrier's were also quartering the fields and 2 Little Bustards were spotted hiding amongst the taller weeds, but once they got out in the open, their black and white neck pattern was very obvious. Having been a long day and a half for most of us, we headed in to an early dinner by Spanish standards and some much needed rest. Dinner still lasted 2 plus hours, was excellent, and we got to 'experiment' with a very sweet thick sherry as well as a coffee liquor, which had to be taken away from Fred and Michael before the bottle was emptied!

Day 2 / Tuesday May 10 – Puerto del Rico; Parador de Gredos; Plataforma de Gredos

It was a three hour drive, first around the Madrid ring road in rush hour and then through very pleasant countryside, dotted with small olive groves before heading north and up in elevation. Oak's became common and Corks were very evident besides the road, most with the bark recently striped. As we climbed higher, Broom became the main vegetation with the lower growing Pyrenean Broom in bright yellow bloom. Birds were few, with the exception of Magpie's and the occasional White Stork, Carrion Crow and a Common Buzzard. We did have 3 Azure-winged Magpie's cross in front of us, but we'll get to see many more over the course of our

two-week trip. By late morning we reached the Puerto del Pico at an elevation of 1352 meters, and was it ever windy, overcast and surprising chilly! For all of us it meant a change of clothes before scoping our first Rock Bunting and Dunnock of the day. There would many more this day. Several Firecrests could be heard calling but with the wind howling, they proved elusive. Chaffinch, Northern Wheatears, Serin, and a singing Wren were seen well as Common Swifts in groups of up to 20 periodically swept right by us while two Griffon Vultures flew over head. As we worked our way back to the vehicles, a Yellow Wagtail showed itself briefly and a male Stonechat was spotted in the same evergreen tree as our Rock Bunting.

Continuing on to the west, we came across a gorgeous Red Kite flying close to the road. Stopping the vans, we watched as 3 Black Kites and a Booted Eagle flew into view and a Hobby chased swifts while a Cuckoo's called from a copse in the valley. A Moroccan Orangetip and Bath White were also along the roadside. A pit stop at the Parador de Gredos (our hotel) before lunch produced Black Redstart, Bonelli's Warbler, Coal Tit, Serin as well as calling cuckoo's and Green Woodpeckers. We stopped for lunch 10 minutes later when we came across a Wood Lark, Great Tit, Chaffinches and a Pied Flycatcher at the edge of a Scotch Pine grove. Here we had an excellent raptor show with soaring Griffon Vultures, a Black Vulture and a Short-toed Eagle.

Our final stop was at the Platforma de Gredos, which was at the end of a lovely road that cut through a lime colored lichen covered granite strewn valley with a fast moving stream – absolutely gorgeous. A group of 4 female and a young spike-buck Spanish Ibex greeted us as they came down the hill to drink at the stream. At the end of the road, several Rock Buntings were busy feeding along the edge and were joined by an Ortolan Bunting while Black Redstarts could be seen flying from one stream boulder to another. It was a steady climb on the wide 'cobblestone' Roman road up the valley, pausing to watch Dunnock's sing from on top on the short broom and catch a fast moving Hobby make its way along the ridge just below the top. A half hour later we were in a more open area where we came across Northern Wheatear and Water Pipit which had come in to drink from a small dripping seep along a cutaway besides the path. Skylarks were 'sky-larking' and of course singing all the time, but it was the Bluethroat that we had hiked all this way to look for. Soon from deep in the dense patch of broom, a stunning Bluethroat popped up and sat watching us for a minute before flying back up the gentle slope. 5 minutes later Margaret had caught up to us, and she got to see it as it kept sitting up, singing very softly. This is an isolated subspecies with an all blue throat. Dipper was heard, but not located on the way back down and as many as 3 Rock Thrush awed the group with their stunning colored plumage. Even those that choose to rest up and not to take the hike got to see it, as they were located near the beginning of the trail. While watching them a male Ibex had come to the parking area to feed and was very confiding with many pictures taken (thank god for digital cameras). 2 Griffon Vultures glided overhead, this time we were able to clearly see the two-toned underwing pattern and a pair of Ortolan Buntings fed in the grasses.

Heading back to the Parador, a brief stop at the bridge where the small streams came together, we had all 3 species of wagtail – grey, yellow and white as well as a Common Sandpiper. The meal was excellent as since this is Spain after all, it should come as no surprise that we were not finished before ten thirty – and were of course the first to leave!

Day 3 / Wednesday May 11 – Parador de Gredos; Puerto de Tornavacas; Tournavacas; Cabezuela del Valle bridge; Jerte River, Petro's Pub; Monfrague, Rio Tajo bridge and Salto del Gitano

Jim and Margaret were awakened by a Tawny Owl at 4 in the morning while most of us awoke with the dawn chorus consisting of Blackbird, Coal and Great Tit, Firecrest, Bonelli's Warbler and Black Redstart at a more respectable 6am. The pre breakfast walk was very successful as we watched.... a Coal Tit bring moss to her nest in a the bank below the car park every two minutes; have a Great Spotted Woodpecker perch besides the church and saw a Short-toed Treecreeper climb up the church façade; Great Tits and Serin's were very visible while two new birds stole the show – a Nuthatch and a pair of Crested Tits that were working the base of Scotch Pines. All this was going on with the sound of cowbells ringing in the background, as cows moved through the meadow below us. Breakfast was a buffet fit for a king – one the likes we have never seen before. We did not do it justice spending only an hour at the table! Just before loading up the vehicles I walked around the back of the Parador and saw a pair of Jays along with a Beech Marten scurry through the pines and head up a tree. A Golden Eagle also flew over the car park. By the time we reached our first stop, the Puerto de Tornavacas, the weather had taken a slight turn for the worse with overcast skies, fast moving dark clouds and a steady drizzle. As soon as we were out of the vehicles, a Whitethroat and Dartford Warbler were seen besides the building but neither showed themselves again in this spot. We walked across the road into a heath

of broom and had great looks in between the dense banks of rolling mist at Ortolan Buntings, Whitethroat, Stonechat, Linnet and Wood Lark. Heading down the Jerte Valley, the broom gave way to an abundance of Sweet Cherry trees and there was no finer example of this than around the town of Tournavacas, with trees even spaced out on terraces with lovely stone support walls. In the town, a quick stop produced a Blue Tit and a White Wagtail busily feeding its two young on an orange tiled roof. In Cabezuela del Valle we used the busy one-lane bridge, with ample space for pedestrians, to scan the Jerte River for White throated Dipper. A Robin was very obliging in a Fig tree below us and to everyone's amazement we watched a Swallow feed its two young on the wing. A flash of blue heading up stream was a Kingfisher – but that was all some people saw. House Martins and Crag Martins were about in good numbers. Walking up river we came across a singing Nightingale in the open and with some patience had a Dipper fly towards us and stop in various spots as it worked its way down river.

Lunch was taken about 15k out of town along the Jerte at Petro's Place, where the first two clients of the days made short work of the toilets. By the time we left, the sign on the door read "No Texans". Black Kites were moving about the valley and Azure-winged Magpie's fought with a Magpie over the right to sit atop a telegraph pole, winning out more times than not. From the meadow below the hacienda, 3 Golden Oriole were seen very well while a singing Cetti's hid once more and a Reed Warbler was more cooperative. Heading back up hill we stopped to check out the butterflies, which included Western Dappled White, Brown Argus, Small Copper and Small Heath. A Hoopoe was calling somewhere in the distance and a Wren perched briefly on a telephone wire leading to the house. Next up, the much anticipated Monfrague National Park. A stop at the entrance gave us a taste of what was to come – half a dozen Griffon Vultures over the escarpment, while Red-rumped Swallows and Azure-winged Magpies entertained us. We wound our way around undulating twisting roads and through oak woodlands with very little understory and through a rather large area of recently cleared eucalyptus woods, which had been planted with young shrubs, to reach the bridge over the Tajo reservoir. As with most reservoirs I have seen worldwide, it came as no surprise that the water level was considerably below normal. Here there were a zillion House Martins flying under and around the bridge along with a few Crag Martins and 2 Alpine Swifts. It was wonderful to get to compare the size difference between the species – the Alpines are humongous beasts!

A short distance further ahead was the Salto Del Gitano "Gypsies Leap" scenic viewpoint with three prominent cliffs bisected by the river and road. On the cliffs and soaring above us in kettles were numerous Griffin's, at times as many as 80 of them and often descending to within 100 feet of us. The cliff closest to the road had an adult tending to her well-grown chick at a nest, which at one point stood up and pecked her mother's bill to get a meal. The sight around us and sheer numbers of raptors was simply stunning, in fact memorizing. As Santi said, "You'll never forget your first time at Monfrague"! An adult Egyptian Vulture was also perched on the cliff across the river and then joined in the aerial display. A pair of Blue Rock Thrushes, the female very different from the male, were resting and preening on a large boulder just below our vantage point. A female Black Stork was seen sitting at her nest in a small cave while a male came gliding effortlessly in overhead. A storm was brewing to the west with dark skies and thunder. Luckily it skirted us and all we got from it was 5 minutes of drizzle before it had passed and we went back to viewing 2 Black Vultures and a Booted Eagle amongst the hordes of Griffin's. From here we headed to the lovely rural village of Aldea del Obispo near Trujillo and our beautiful and quaint cottage.

Day 4 / Thursday May 12 – Trujillo-Caceres Plains; Trujillo town square and castle

This morning's dawn chorus consisted of an entirely new cast of characters.....house sparrow, spotless starling, swallow and chickens. Packing up to leave following breakfast it began to drizzle and by the time we reached Trujillo we were in a middle of.... the rain in Spain is on the plain. It was brief and by the time we reached the Trujillo-Caceres plain, a mixture of rolling grasslands, cereal crops and arable land, the rain slowed down and it began to get brighter. They desperately need the rain, and this was a drop in the bucket.

A Great Bustard standing out in the open was a great way to start the day as well as being a good omen for the remainder of the morning. Rain drenched Rollers followed, sitting on the wire beside telegraph poles, but the colors were rather subdued until they dried out. A small pond held the obligatory Mallards, as well as a family of Little Grebes; a pair of Gadwall and a Moorhen, and White Storks patrolled the fields in search of reptiles, rodents and insects. The show here really belonged to the Montagu Harriers with as many as twenty plus quartering the fields and by late morning pairs displayed high in the sky, while Calandra Larks, mostly out of

view well above us, filled the surroundings with their song. A pair of Little Owls were perched on an outcropping and occasionally flew to the fence posts lining the road where Crested Larks and Corn Buntings would put in occasional appearances. A Red-legged Partridge was seen well standing guard on a rock and later chasing two others through the fields. Black Kites would coast by regularly and Jim spotted a Grey Heron as it flew away from us. The monotonous 'buzzing' or is the 'zitting' call of the Zitting Cisticola was heard as it flew along the edge of the field where we were standing and landed on the barbed wire fence several hundred feet further down the road for all of us to see well in the scope.

By the time we got another kilometer up the road the Rollers had dried out and their vibrant turquoise colors were very visible as they displayed, showing everyone present why they are named Rollers. A one point Russ spotted sandgrouse that were flushed by a low flying harrier, flying away and over a ridge – black-bellies. A little scanning eventually produced two male Pin-tailed Sandgrouse that slowly walked away from us, and the further away they got, the better they blended in. A female joined them as they neared a large group of sheep. We stopped to watch a pair of Corn Buntings with beaks full of crickets waiting for the 'all clear' before heading to their ground nest to feed a large brood of chicks.

We had a large kettle of Black Kites that included a Common Buzzard and a two Red Kites, rise out of the valley and disperse. In the valley good numbers of Griffin Vultures were hanging out, occasional getting up and soaring about. A plowed field was the perfect spot for Calandra and Short-toed Larks with the black underwings and white trailing edge to the wing very visible on the Calandras as the flew around. It took some patience, but we all saw the Short-toed well as we followed them rising in display and returning to the ground at great speed. 5 Black-bellied Sandgrouse flew across the road giving us far better views than earlier. A Little Owl was spotted sitting along an opening in the wall of a farm building and here we heard the short 'fart' call of the Little Bustard very close to us. In spite of the short grass, we could only see his neck and head on occasion. I walked into the field. He could have been no more than 40 metres from us, but somehow he managed to magically vanish, though at one point he did taunt me by calling twice more, and in no time I was again in 'the spot', but no bird.

Another kettle of vultures produced a Black Vulture and Bee-eaters rounded out what turned out to be a lovely time on the plains, for most of us. Unfortunately Mike was coming down with a case of the "Spain pains", so we took him to the hospital in Trujillo. Once he saw the size of the suppositories that he was to take and found out that there was no charge for the doctor's visit he perked right up. Santi took Mike back to the cottage for a little R & R, while we visited the marvelous town square, with its 12 century church, statue of Pizzaro and 10th century fortress / castle that stood at the top of the town, with a 360 degree panoramic view of the surrounding countryside. Lesser Kestrels were hawking insects above the tiled roof tops and Pallid Swifts joined their more numerous cousins, Commons, screaming through and above the narrow alleys. Much to our delight, we somehow managed to avoid the severe weather that was around us today.

Day 5 / Friday May 13 – Dehesa b/w Aldea del Obispo and A5; Torrecillas de la Tiesa; Belen Plains; Arrocampo Reservoir

It looked as though it was going to finally be the kind of day one would expect in Spain at this time of year, but it was not long before we could see that the surrounding areas were getting a little rain, and with more wind than the previous day the temperatures were chilly, never getting out of the 60's. A juvenile Black Stork, seen in a small pond between our village of Aldea del Obispo and the A5, was a pleasant sight. We pulled over and watched it fly further up the wetland, which was located between the dehesa and agricultural fields. Here Grey Heron, White Wagtail and a Spanish Pond Turtle were seen along the mudflats and an assortment of passerines were about including Rock Sparrows, Corn Buntings, Crested Lark, Great Tit, Woodchat Shrikes, Bee-eaters and Hoopoes along with the usual Magpie and Azure-winged and Black Kites, though our first kite this morning was a Red. The small park in Torrecillas de la Tiesa, which had a variety of exotic evergreen vegetation and eucalyptus, and was rather untidy, had had a family of Long-eared Owls in it the day before, but today even with all our meticulous searching we could not locate one. However, there were plenty of Goldfinch's as well as a family of noisy and hungry Great Tits being feed their parents. As we left the park a mixed pair of Booted Eagles were sighted along with Griffon Vultures.

The Belen plains are smaller that the Trujillo-Carceres plains, though with very similar habitat and a few more farm buildings dotted about. We caught up to a large raptor that was flying ahead of us besides the road, which turned out to be a juvenile Short-toed Eagle. An abandoned farm had a Hoopoe calling from the lichen covered

orange tiled roof as well as a Lesser Kestrel patrolling the derelict buildings. A small farm pond with a clump of a few tall dead trees next to it was full of White Stork nests with babies, Cattle Egrets, Jackdaws and several Little Egrets.

Though this may not seem terribly exciting it was the Bald Ibis that commanded our attention as it perched with the storks and flew around the trees when Black Kites would get the whole group to panic and take flight. Of uncertain origin, it was an un-banded adult, likely from the small and last remaining wild population (less than 300) in Morocco. There has been a release program in Southern Spain this year, but they are banded juveniles.

By lunchtime, a rainstorm was passing through, so our sandwiches crisps and juice were eaten in the car as we searched the oak dehasa in front of us for Black-winged Kites. It took some work, but the time the sun came out we had a pair sitting on top of an oak. Little Bustards were calling in the short grass fields. One was located about 200 metres away and could be seen tilting his head backwards slightly and inflating his neck (black feathers) and calling. Even with the wind blowing in our direction, it took a second for the sound to reach us. After a while he took off and his display consisted of a short fluttery flight where his wings were beating fast and never were raised above horizontal. A pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos raced across the landscape and where later seen being chased by a Maggie – its host! Stone Curlew was heard a number of times but we could never locate one.

As another rainstorm rolled in we pulled into a bar for tea, coffee and bathrooms and timed it perfectly – by the time we were finished the event was over. Next up we visited the Arrocampo Reservoir, a rather densely vegetated border of reed beds with bodies of open water. As with the park, not the cleanest of places, but with patience we got the birds. Great looks at Squacco and Purple Heron both in flight, while Great Reed Warblers were calling non-stop, though only once did one show itself, quickly flying across a narrow strip of water. Reed and Savi's Warbler were also heard. The Cetti's eventually showed itself to most of the group - for a bird that is so vocal it certainly is elusive. A couple of Coots and Moorhens were along the edge of the reeds and somehow Santi found a barely visible nesting Purple Swamphen, a foot off the water in a clump of reeds. Through the scope one could make out the red bill and shield as well as some purple. At one point she maneuvered about her tight quarters for a better look. Both male and female Western Marsh Harriers were quartering the beds, though most of the time they kept out of sight. We also had the occasional showing of terns, with a few Gull-billed, Little and Whiskered flying past.

On the larger body of water a (Great) Cormorant was perched on a pier and a stunning Great Crested Grebe was diving for dinner. On one of the pylon's under one of the many storks nest, Spanish Sparrows could be seen well coming and going from their condo's built amongst the sticks.

Day 6 / Saturday May 14 – Almonte River; Monfrague, Castillo de Monfrague, Villarreal de San Carlos, Road to Plasencia, La Tajadilla, La Portilla del Tietar, Salto del Gitano

Again, Black Storks besides the road forced us to stop! What a beautiful bird this is with its red legs and bill contrasting with the black and white feathers. We were at the bridge crossing the Almonte River on our way to Monfrague, when we spotted the adult with a juvenile. We spent the remainder of this gorgeous day in Monfrague. A stop at a scenic point to photograph the escarpment with the castle on top produced 3 distant Mistle Thrushes on a wire along with a Booted Eagle and the first of many Woodchat Shrikes. The 137 steps to the 8th century castle was not as bad as would have expected and made all the better as we had just seen several White-rumped Swifts flying above the car park. The view from the top was exceptional, overlooking the reservoir, Tajo and Tietar Rivers and Mediterranean forest. Assortments of hirundines were flying around the castle including Crag and House Martin, Common and White-rumped Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows. Both vultures were seen though only a few individuals. There was great excitement when we had great but brief views of a European Honey Buzzard that was gliding northwards, no doubt a migrant. A distant Peregrine was spotted, but it just kept flying further and further away. In the vegetation around the base of the small castle ruins, Black Redstart, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Blue Rock Thrush and a Red-billed Chough were seen well. Following a visit to the bathroom and visitors center in village of Villarreal de San Carlos we headed up the road to Plasencia stopping in several spots to look for Bonelli's Eagle. No luck with that species this morning, but we did come across a Black Vulture nest, several Black-eared Wheatears, a Sardinian and small groups of Subalpine Warblers as well as singing Wood Larks and Nightingales.

We took lunch at a wonderful shaded spot, La Tajadilla, looking across the river at the cliff face where an Egyptian Vulture was nesting and many Griffons were 'hanging out'. A Black Kite was also very visible on a nest in the trees that ran along the top of the riverbank below the cliff. Being such a beautiful weekend day many people were out and this was a favorite spot. The small ridge behind us was a great place to watch an Egyptian fly towards us and over us as it came in to relieve its mate of nest duty. She then proceeded to fly to the open rocks at one end of the cliff, preen and then take off back across the river, where she was escorted by a Black Kite. A pair of Black Storks were also seen flying over the ridge, one with its feet awkwardly dangling down as it came in to land. Looking down at the shallow river, which was just below the dam, there were Gray Wagtails foraging along the waters edge and a Spanish Purple Hairstreak was seen besides the railing.

At the Portilla del Tietar, a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles, one of only 11 in the park, was nesting on the far side of the Tietar, just to the side of an impressive rock outcropping, which held the ubiquitous Griffins. She was very much obscured, only showing the top of her head at best on occasion. Santi asked us to be patient and we would be rewarded. Meanwhile Red-legged Partridge, Nightingales, Serins and Chaffinches could be heard and Blue Tit as well as Long-tailed Tit was seen. As we continuously faced the nest hoping for a better view, an Egyptian Vulture put in an appearance and eventually a Spanish Imperial Eagle was spotted soaring and circling above the outcropping before it flew out of view behind the rocks. It was not long before he was up again, this time flying across the river, over us and away. Later, as Santi had promised, she stood up on the nest giving us great views of her head and shoulder pattern as she stretched before settling back down. A Holly Blue butterfly and a pair of Large Psammodroma's with the male having a firm clasp on the female with his teeth, part of the mating ritual, were seen at our feet as we searched in vain for Eagle Owls amongst the rock outcropping.

A short distance away the landscape changed as we were amongst Cork Oak woodland with Azure-winged Magpies, Rock Sparrows and shrikes flying about. Great views of an Orphean Warbler were had in a Cork Oak besides the road. The afternoon stop for Bonelli's Eagle was far more successful with a pair seen stooping a number of times before riding the thermals into the sun! A busload of students on an educational outing beat us to the Salto del Gitano, but that did not stop us from enjoying an hour watching the Griffons soar. Egyptians, including a dark sub-adult as well as Black Storks were seen well. There were far more Griffons today than our first visit, probably well over 200, and no doubt due to the better weather conditions. Some were flying in tandem and occasionally in groups of three to six – a very impressive sight. As we were packing up Jim drew my attention to an Iberian Wall Lizard scurrying across the viewing area, our second reptile species of the day!

Day 7 / Sunday May 15 – Belen Plains; Villuercas Range; Cabanas del Castillo; Trujillo town square; Merida; Alange Dam

This morning a Little Owl calling in town awoke me. We would see one standing on top of an abandoned farmhouse in the Belen plains before it decided to hide behind the peak of the roof just showing the top of its head and those large yellow eyes. It took just a couple of stops in the plains this morning to get great looks at everything we wanted. A Short-toed Eagle was perched on a telegraph pole where we were able to see the large blocky head and yellow eyes that it has. As we neared in the vehicles it flew besides us down the road and landed on another pole, before flying off once more. We came to an abrupt halt when we spotted a pair of Greater Spotted Cuckoos chasing each other. Piling out the van, it did not take long before they were located again, perched in a tree and then in flight, at one stage being chased by a Magpie. The Spanish name for cuckoo is *crialo* which means, "you take care of it", a reference to them laying their eggs in someone else's nest. All the time a Little Bustard was calling on the slope not too far away out in the open. The views of it displaying with the black neckband expanding just before it calls were exceptional.

Hoopoes were chasing each other about and landing feet away from a White Stork nest that could only have been 6 feet off the ground. Santi spotted 2 Stone Curlews or Eurasian Thick-Knees, as they are now known, along the stonewall not far from where the bustard was.

From here we headed south east and along the Villuercas Range, an area of Corks with rising hills with outcroppings, escarpments and cliffs running along the ridge to the tiny sleepy village of Cabanas del Castilla set just below the rocks with a castle above it. We stopped at a bend in the road to look under the tall bridge at a White-rumped Swift nest that was used last year. It was a long tubular shape made of red mud that had a Wren fly out of it. The swifts are one of the last migrants to return, having just arrived. This is because they do

not build their own nests; instead preferring to use a Red-rumped Swallow nest that has already been used to raise their brood. The swifts claim the nest by placing a few white feathers at the entrance of the chamber. 3 Black Storks circled high above us and Blackcaps were singing along the stream with Iberian Pond Frogs croaking and Stripe-necked Terrapins sunning themselves on the rocks in the water.

Once we reached the village, we walked up the windy narrow cobblestone street to the church passing the jail and gallows to look for Black Wheatears. Black Redstarts, Crag Martins nesting under an archway on the church, Blue and Great Tits greeted us, and it was not long before a pair of wheatears showed, alighting in various places along the cliff face. A Grey Wagtail even joined them at one stage.

Walking around the corner and through a gap in the cliff to the other side of the ridge we came across a number of Blue Rock Thrushes, Alpine Swift and a Peregrine that was nesting on a tall cliff face. She was flying around chasing Griffins and returning to a favorite perch. The walk back through the village produced a gorgeous singing Melodious Warbler and a Large Psammmodromus that Michael located.

We had lunch besides the road watching a pair of Golden Eagles flying along the top of the ridge and at one stage rise a short distance and gently stoop, as if half heartily displaying. She even landed at her huge stick nest on the cliff face, her size very evident even from the distance we were at. All the time we were watching them there were at least 5 Hoopoe's calling non-stop with 3 of them chasing each other around oak trees.

A quick stop at the square in Trujillo followed by a petrol stop with a Red Kite and we were off westward to Merida. The landscape began to change, soils were red and orange with iron; there was even a section besides the road with rice fields; vineyards and olive groves became more evident and along with it, a slightly more densely populated rural landscape with small villages and towns with orange tiled roof and whitewashed houses dotting the countryside. At Merida we visited the Roman ruins, in particular the marvelous Amphitheater and Theatre dating back to 3BC as well as the ancient roman bridge that looked for all the world as though it was only a hundred or so years old. Their engineering has certainly stood the test of time, and though vehicles are no longer allowed over it, it was well used by pedestrians on this sunny Sunday afternoon.

A final stop on our way to the hotel produced Alpine Swifts, Crag Martins, Jackdaws and a mixed pair of Booted Eagle besides the Alange Dam.

Day 8 / Monday May 16 – La Serena Plains

There's rain on the plain in Spain. It has been the driest winter and spring on record here in Extremadura, and they were all praying for rain, even the slightest bit. Well after it looked as though it would be another beautiful day the skies darkened and the clouds lowered and covered the Serena plains, giving them a much needed soaking. But, before this happened we managed to get in 3 hours of great birding including a visit to a noisy 200 plus strong colony of Spanish Sparrows in a eucalyptus grove; watch Black-bellied Sandgrouse fly all around us seemingly undecided about where the best spot to land was; have 5 Montagu Harrier's quarter the tapestry of fields; have an assortment of other raptors including Egyptian Vulture, Short-toed Eagle, Common Kestrel, Black Kite and Common Buzzard in view at one time or another; be stunned by the subtle beauty of a pair of Collared Pranticole's as they flew low over the plains and preened within several hundred feet; have Calandra Lark's singing all around us and bringing food into their nests and watch a Great Bustard out in the open fields feeding. A Black Stork was also seen, as were 2 Gull-billed Terns and a superb Stone Curlew not too far from our vehicle. With the rains picking up we decided to head back to our base for the remainder of the afternoon.

Day 9 / Tuesday May 17 – La Serena Plains; Corboba; Hotel Humania nr. Malaga in the Sierra Nevada's

A return to the La Serena Plains on a cool but clear morning with the lovely sound of Calandra Larks calling in the air was a great success. Our main target was Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, and as what usually happens in these cases, all we could locate and see were Black-bellieds, loads of them. Great Bustard was seen well as were the usual larks, Montagu Harriers and White Storks. We could hear the *cah-cah* calls of Pin-tails and soon located a pair in the distance that landed. The views were not that satisfactory. Then one was seen briefly in flight, again at a distance. We moved closer to the two, only to have them take off, along with another pair that we had not located. Within a few minutes one could be heard calling again, and soon it was flying right towards us, then around us for some amazing views of this beautiful bird. After flying away, another one came

screaming in giving us similar views. A nice find and a great way to end our plains visit was a Little Owl perched atop a small pile of rocks.

From here we had a fair distance to go as we were leaving Extremadura for Andalucia with a stop in the ancient European capital of Corboba. Dropping everyone off near the 8th century Mosque, Santi and I proceeded to park the vehicles. What ensued was a search for a space, which led to being kicked out of a horse and cart spot; going down the very narrow cobbled streets of the Jewish quarter the wrong way only to find that I was having to brush aside pedestrians and merchandise hanging on the outside walls of stores. Eventually, some 600 metres in I came face to face with a small van coming down the one-way street in the right direction. After much discussion between Spanish drivers and a look from me of 'I'm just a foreigner, I'll take the tourist exemption' it was agreed that all those that were wrong, and that would be 3 vehicles (someone decided that they would follow me), would have to back up. Picture trying to put toothpaste back into the toothpaste tube – that is what it felt like.

Somehow 20 minutes later, we were back on normal size roads still looking for a parking space, eventually parking a 5-minute walk from where we dropped everyone off. That was the good news! The bad news was that I could not lock my vehicle, so one of us had to stay with the van! It turned out that more than likely it had something to do with nearby security systems that deactivate other security systems, as Santi at one stage could not unlock his van!

Anyway, the highlight of the 2-hour tour of the old part of Corboba was the visit to the mosque and cathedral, built around each other. Crossing the old bridge over the Guadalhorce River towards the small square castle, Cetti's Warbler was heard; Black-crowned Night Herons were fishing along the fast moving currents and there were hordes of Cattle Egrets in the shrubs and trees. Following a 2 hour plus ride through a heavily striped hilly landscape that was replaced with Olive groves for as far as the eye could see, we reached our hotel situated on a windy road in a wooded valley in the middle of a natural park, only a short distance from the Mediterranean coast. What a setting!

Following dinner Santi and I went for a night walk and soon heard Red-necked Nightjar calling a few times; managed to call in a pair of Tawny Owls and heard Wild Boars rummaging about in the dark.

Day 10 / Wednesday May 18 – The grounds of the Humania Hotel; El Torcal Nature Reserve; Guadalhorce River Mouth

A pre breakfast walk around the grounds produced a variety of bird song including Wren, Firecrest, Chaffinch, Cuckoo and Turtle Dove along with sightings of Blackcap, Melodious Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, Goldfinch, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Common Buzzard, Nightingale, Serin and Blue Tit including a young bird that had just left the nest and was barely able to escape the jaws of the resident dogs.

Just as we were getting into our vehicles after breakfast to head out for the day, Santi heard a Wryneck. Shortly thereafter we were catching glimpses of the bird and occasionally having it out in full view as it worked its way around the hotel. A stop at the top of the hill above the hotel in the pines produced a flurry of activity. Mistle Thrushes and a Jay were what first caught our attention, but Coal and Great Tits, a number of Short-toed Treecreepers, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Nuthatch and at least half a dozen Crossbills is what kept us in the one spot for a good half an hour. Booted Eagle was also seen flying over the ridge.

We wound our way up the scenic road towards the Torcal de Antequera Nature Reserve with its stunning weathered limestone formations. A first stop at the base of the rocks produced a Sardinian Warbler, the first of many Goldfinches and Corn Buntings, Alpine Swift, Common Kestrel and a lone Eurasian Vulture along with numerous Spanish Gatekeepers, Small Whites, Orange Tip, Clouded Yellow and a Spanish Marbled White. As we continued onto greater heights we stopped as a large green Oscillated Lizard crossed the road, but it soon disappeared into a crevice, much to my dismay as I was in the second vehicle and one of the few that did not get to see this beauty. Several more stops were very successful with Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Rock Bunting, Melodious Warbler, Crested Lark and Rock Sparrow seen very well amongst the rocks. Thekla Lark was about but never really gave us the looks we wanted and 2 Ibex were spotted atop the rocks, one of which all we could see were its huge horns breaking the skyline.

At the top, some 1100 metres up, the car park had a horde of people that had come to see this unique spot and the stunning views it offered. We had some of the same birds that we had seen further down the road, but did see a pair of Red-billed Choughs as well as some new butterflies – Red Admiral, Knapweed Fritillary, Scare Swallowtail and Wall Brown, the latter two at times puddling.

Following our lunch at the top, and an hours drive to the coast, we reached the Guadalhorce River mouth and the Mediterranean Sea for a new habitat and set of birds as well as being warmer, reaching the low 80's on this bright sunny day. House Martin's were nesting above the top windows of the apartment complex next to the car park and several Monk Parakeets flew by. Sanderlings, Ringed and Kentish Plover were our first shorebirds, feeding along the edge of a pond. Scanning the very calm sea, Sandwich Terns and Yellow-legged Gulls were sitting on markers or on one of the two buildings several hundreds metres out, while a Cory's Shearwater was spotted gently gliding over the water in search of food, at times being harassed by the gulls.

A nice sighting was 3 Long-finned Pilot Whales breaking the surface several times near the buildings. From here we walked across the hot sand and along the pathway to reach the former gravel pits, which are now a series of ponds. Black-winged Stilts were very conspicuous, noisily making alarm calls as they kept their day old chicks well aware of all possible danger. Amongst a number of Coots and a Gadwall, two 1st year male White-headed Ducks were diving, these being a very rare duck and frequent breeder with the 'non native' and the similar looking Ruddy Duck. Tucked in the shade of the Tamarisks on the edge of the water were half a dozen sleeping Pochards, while a Dunlin and Little Ringed Plover were feeding nearby. On a small sand bar an adult and 2nd year Yellow-legged Gull were roosting. Melodious Warblers were singing and giving excellent views as we went around.

Walking to the second pond, Bee-eaters were all around us and Greenfinches were busy feeding on weed seeds, but the biggest surprise was seeing a single Flamingo flying down the channel and out to sea. As we reached the pond a female Little Bittern and Purple Heron were spooked and here we saw an adult pair of White-headed Ducks. The next pond produced a brief glimpse of a Purple Swamphen and some Moorhens. From here we climbed up a bank onto the path that runs besides the river and took it all the way to the sea. Whiskered Terns came flying in and landed on the mud flats while a Grey (Black-bellied) Plover was located walking amongst a large group of Coots. Clouded Yellows and a Swallowtail added to the butterflies list. Walking along the beach, the sea was still very calm and it was not until reached our staring point and were heading back to the vehicles that a Gannet was spotted.

Following dinner we went owling. This evening the sky was brighter and the Tawny Owl did not respond for a good 25 minutes, and when we did hear him he was a fair distance away. It took a while, but in the end he came closer and circled around us never showing himself, though Russ did get a brief look at a silhouette. We moved to the hotel patio as he moved in that direction, and his mate soon joined him. Both calls are very different and distinctive. So close, yet so far.

Day 11 / Thursday May 19 – La Alhambra; Sierra Nevada Mountain Range

This morning we journeyed to Granada to visit La Alhambra to see the influence that the Muslims had on the Spanish culture. From our winding climb up the hill side on the outskirts of the city to the entrance way we had no idea as to what lay ahead or the breathtaking beauty of this 13th century site. With the lowlands to the south and west and the Sierra Nevada mountain range to the east and north it was perfectly positioned on a hilltop to serve for centuries as a fortified palace built by Ibn al-Ahmar, founder of the Nasrid dynasty. Most of the walls, floors and ceilings were decorated with tiles, wood and stone carvings, the three basics of Islamic decoration. The stunning gardens, many of them with simply water features and running water channels, filled the open space between the buildings and we were easily transported back in time to a different world.

Leaving La Alhambra we climbed up the Sierra Nevada's, the highest mountain range in southern Spain to reach the ski lodge at the top. Here at 2550 metres, Black Redstarts and Northern Wheatears were around the vendors huts, most of which were open on his gorgeous (at this elevation) low 60 degree day; Crag and House Martins as well as Common Swifts and a Pallid Swift were flying along the small escarpment that we were looking down for the Alpine Accentor. Eventually one walked up a large boulder and showed itself perfectly some 60 feet below us. It stayed until being unseated by a pair of Wheatears. Small Tortoiseshell and Grizzled

Skipper were two new butterflies that we saw at this elevation. A spot a little further down the mountain with very low vegetation consisting mainly of gorse, produced a Spectacled Warbler which showed very well sitting atop the vegetation as he worked his way around us; 2 Tawny Pipits that were playing more hide than seek, though on a couple of occasions were seen well by most of us; a brief distant look at a Thekla Lark and a pair of Sky Larks. From here it was 2-hour journey back to our hotel, where the Tawny Owl was heard calling in the last hour of the day.

Day 12 / Friday May 20 – Sierra de Las Nieves; Ronda

Our sole goal for our pre-breakfast walk was to view the Wryneck and before long one was spotted in the large pines besides the car park. It flew across the dirt road and showed itself for 10 minutes giving us stunning views in the scope.

Following breakfast we descended the hills into Malaga and along the Costa del Sol, a highly built up and 'desirable' corridor along the southeastern Spanish coast for sun-seekers. At Marbella we turned north and worked our way up the very windy road, with views across the valley to Gibraltar and the North African coast, to the Sierra de Las Nieves. This is a densely vegetated rocky range, not terribly high (only to 1900 metres), with an endemic Spanish Fir forest at the upper reaches. It also receives the most rainfall in Spain, and no doubt explained the lush understory and meadow area that was evident at our first stop, which was full of butterflies – Black-veined Whites, Marsh Fritillaries, Moroccan Orange Tips, Wall Brown, Clouded Yellow, Scarce Swallowtail and several unidentified blues. A Short-toed Eagle was seen descending behind the oaks on a distant ridge and Wood Larks were the most conspicuous of the birds in this area, though Melodious Warbler and Corn Bunting were seen.

A second stop at a bridge along a dry riverbed produced several Iberian Rock Lizards and another astonishing variety of butterflies including Brimstone and a stunner, the Spanish Festoon. Chaffinches, Great Tits, Melodious and Subalpine Warbler were calling but sightings were few and far between. Reaching our first Spanish Fir, we stopped to view this new species and watched a pair of Firecrest flit about in a pine above our heads, cross the road and return to the pine, only feet away. A Jay flew across the road, its white rump very evident, but little else. It would take several sightings over the course of the next hour or so for everyone to get a 'good enough' view of this rather secretive (at times) specie. During lunch we witnessed a pair of Booted Eagles displaying.

Not too far away lies the beautiful town of Ronda, the bullfighting capital of the country, which is divided by a bridge that spans a 300 deep gorge. Walking along the escarpment we watched Red-billed Choughs and an assortment of swifts including Alpine fly below us. It was another 2-hour ride back to the hotel, which was broken up with Monk Parakeets and a pair of Orange-winged Parrots flying across the highway very near the Guadalhorce River on the outskirts of Malaga.

Day 13 / Saturday May 21 – Donana National Park - La Rocina, Maresma del Rocio marsh

I awoke this morning at 4:50 to a calling Tawny Owl outside my window. At 5:30 I decided to look out the window and respond. It immediately flew across the patio, visible in the outside lights and melted into the surrounding woods, though still very vocal. 15 minutes later the female was calling and by 6 all three of us had called it a 'night'.

This morning we headed west for the 3-hour journey to El Rocio just on the outskirts of Donana National Park. A few birds were seen on the way including a Jay on the Humaina grounds, Booted Eagles on the ridge and a pair of Common Cuckoos and a Green Woodpecker flying over the vans en route. A bathroom break produced Hoopoe, Eurasian Collared Dove and White Stork. The traffic was rather heavy on this weekend morning as we drove around the Sevilla ring road. West of Sevilla the landscape became more agricultural, with the olive groves being replaced with a variety of low growing fruits and vegetables as the soils were predominately sandy with patches of Stone Pines that looked like giant umbrellas.

Our first stop was La Rocina, where some of us had lunch and visited the visitor's center before walking through the Stone Pines on the boardwalk to the blinds that surround the marshes. Bee-eaters were calling overhead while Greenfinches were heard throughout the pines; our first Black Kites in a number of days were

gliding about; Spotted Flycatchers could be seen flying from their perches to pick off insects and Tree Sparrows hopped about the ground looking for food.

Head high Bracken lined fences along the boardwalk led to each thatched roof blind. The first blind looked out over a wide area of the marsh with various sized bodies of water, grassy areas, rush and reed beds.

Spoonbills, in breeding plumage, were the most common species with a few Glossy Ibis feeding amongst them. Mallards, of course, were about and a Pochard to also seen. We studied the half dozen or so Eurasian Coots to check for Red-knobbed Coot, and sure enough one was found amongst them. Because we were not that close to it to see the two small red knobs on the forehead, we had to rely on the bill color, it being of a bluish hue rather than the pinkish coloration of its more common cousin, and the structure – thinner neck and more accentuated body with raised rear. A Great White Egret was seen at the back off the marsh, but spent most of its time out of sight, as did a Purple Heron. Grey Herons were a little more cooperative and we did get sightings of a Purple Swamphen.

A rather large group of Long-tailed Tits worked their way through the pines above the blind calling non-stop as they went. Each blind was separated by 1 kilometer or more which made for a pleasant walk through a variety of habitats, both shaded and out in the open, which on this bright day was rather hot compared to what we had experienced so far on the trip. As the boardwalk wound along the edge of a marsh a pair of Reed Warblers were rather cooperative showing themselves from time to time as they busily worked their way around the reeds and overhanging branches of the trees. At the second blind, the low insect like thrill of Savi's Warbler was heard and he was located perched atop the reeds where he would stay long enough for several people to scope him at a time. This was a different location to view the same area that we had been viewing at the first blind. A second Red-knobbed Coot was spotted here, as were far better views of Purple Swamphen, including one swimming. Great Reed Warbler's were doing their odd calls of grunts and groans but never would show themselves. The walk to the third blind was a greater distance but we did see Booted Eagles, Serin, Spotted Flycatcher, Melodious Warbler and heard Nightingales, though the Iberian Chiffchaff did elude us. As we worked our way towards the blinds the pines began to thin out and there was a considerable scrub understory over this very sandy area. A Cuckoo flew over us and could be heard calling from the blind. The activity at this blind was rather quiet other than a look at Savi's and calling Nightingales and Hoopoe's around us. Oh, and let us not forget the naked man that appeared in the marsh much to the amusement of the ladies in the group – what was he doing there anyway? We headed back from here picking up Short-toed Treecreepers, Woodchat Shrike, a Female Pied Flycatcher and two Spanish Purple Hairstreaks.

On the southern side of El Rocio there was an extensive area of open marsh that we viewed from a track adjacent to the main road. 2 Flamingo's were resting a good distance out though most of the birds were closer, including a Shoveler, several Lapwings, Black-tailed Godwits and Collared Prantiocole's amongst the commoner species. Several Marsh Harriers were also quartering the near corner of the marsh. After settling into our cottage on the edge of town, some of us ventured out into another corner of the marsh where there were considerable numbers of Dunlins and Ringed Plovers. In the background on drier land were Fallow Deer and Jim picked out Greylag Geese amongst the White Stork.

Day 14 / Sunday May 22 – Donana - Hato Raton, Lucio del Cangrejo, Fao Lagoon at Jose Antonio Valverde visitors center, El Acebuche visitor's center

This morning we headed along the gravel road that leads into the heart of Donana. It has been an exceptionally dry winter and the channels running along the road as well as a number of ponds were covered in baked mud. On one side of the road there was scrub and marshes while the other was agricultural vegetable crops, though a great many fields were fallow. In an orange grove at the beginning of the track we picked up a pair of Stone Curlews that played hide and seek between the rows but in the end gave wonderful views. Crested and Calandra Larks, once again, were all around us singing, and one never tired of seeing Calandra's in display.

A pair of Red-legged Partridges were spotted walking away from the road and as soon as we spotted 4 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse they took flight, again giving us great views. As we continued south, we would come across a few Short-toed Larks on the road, a Zitting Cisticola calling, Common Buzzard and a Woodchat Shrike and where there was a little water a Spoonbill or Stork, but it was a Short-toed Eagle that captivated us as it hung in the air looking for prey close to the road.

At the Lucio del Cangrejo, the body of water at the bend in the road, there were numerous Whiskered Tern's working their way from one end of the marsh to the other and as we followed them, we would come across Grey Herons and Spoonbills resting along the edges. A Purple Swamphen and Purple Heron would occasionally show themselves, though the later tended to be a little more secretive. On one of the only buildings that we passed, a Little Owl was perched on the wall of the compound. A great find was a pair of Spectacled Warblers that showed very well along the fence lines that lined the road.

We took lunch at the visitor's center while scanning the Fao Laguna, clearly visible through the large plate glass windows in the center. Amongst the numbers of Coots, Pochards, Little Grebes and Mallards, there were a few male Shovelers, the females no doubt on eggs, a Black-crowned Night Heron, Whiskered Terns, 5 Purple Herons and 7 Glossy Ibis and a very confiding Purple Swamphen that paraded in front of the viewing area. Collared Pranticoles, Lapwing's and Dunlins were roosting on a sand bar a good distance out, but would occasionally get up and fly around. Several pranticoles could be seen displaying. Once it landed it would walk about flapping its wings to draw attention to itself. Both Fallow and Red Deer were also seen here.

On the journey back we soon came across a half dozen Lesser Short-toed Lark's on the road and had one perch up on a shrub for us. We could not have asked for better looks. No doubt being drawn to the smell of recent dead fish in a fast shrinking pool, a large kettle of Griffin Vultures were observed, numbering 80 plus, circling above the canal. Two other species caught our eye before exiting the area, a Black Stork and an adult and juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron.

We finished up the afternoon at Donana's southern visitor's center, El Acebuche, where Azure-winged Magpies were found "doing the rounds" around the picnic tables in the Stone Pine grove picking up any scraps left from the Sunday afternoon crowd. At the first blind, a Swallow was nesting inside and a Moorish Gecko put in a brief appearance climbing up the side of one of the windows, while in the marsh there was an assortment of individuals including close up views of Lapwing and Little Ringed Plover. On the way to the second blind we picked up the chattering of a Dartford Warbler in the scrubby low vegetation besides the boardwalk, but it never showed itself. Outside the blind, two young male Golden Oriole's were very vocal and showed well as they moved about between the pines.

Following a Paella dinner, a short horse ride down our sandy street, a few hardy souls walked 15 minutes away into an open wooded area on the edge of the Donana Park called Ajoli to look for Red-necked Nightjar. With a full moon and small Piperstrelle bats flying about on this pleasant evening, Little Owl was the first to call, followed by a Red-necked Nightjar that flew in front of us. It soon disappeared only to return 5 minutes later and get us all excited, as there were actually 3 birds that landed within 50 feet of us. They did not stay long, but long enough to get good views. Unfortunately, despite calling a few times they did not return. We did however, hear the hissing of a Barn Owl while waiting for them to appear again. A wonderful end to the day!

Day 15 / Monday May 23 – Laguna Primera de Palos; Laguna de El Portil; La Calatilla; Odiel Marshes; Breakwater

This morning a few woke up with various ailments and unfortunately Nan had to stay behind. For the rest of us, we spent this morning working out way around lagoons, marshes, salt pannes and coastal areas west of Donana with regular stops to help ease what besieged half the group. For some, this helped, but for Theresa it made it worse.

Driving along the Stone Pine covered coastal dunes we reached the Laguna Primera de Palos on the edge of an oil refinery. Coots were all over the place and 2 Red-knob's with white collar bands were found amongst them, along with a Great Crested Grebe, numerous Pochards and a dozen Red-crested Pochards, including two males. While scanning, a Zitting Cisticola worked its way noisily along the marsh edge. Whiskered Terns and Glossy Ibis flew from one location to another while Purple Herons stood motionless. A Squacco Heron emerged from the reeds and a Little Bittern flew in front of us rounding out a nice start to the day.

The second lagoon was the El Portil Laguna where we compared a 2nd year Lesser Black-backed Gull and Yellow-legged Gull in flight and had two albino Black-necked Grebe's known as Eared Grebe's in our part of the world. The highlight here was a pair of Ferruginous Ducks that flew in, the white wing stripe very evident, as they landed not to far from us. As is characteristic with this species, they spent the time in and out of the

short reeds at times giving us exceptional views as they came towards us, before deciding to head to the other side of the lagoon and disappear into the vegetation.

At the La Calatilla Laguna we began with a very exposed Great Reed Warbler singing (or grunting) his heart out from the top of a cattail and had a pair of Little Bitterns fly out of the cattails with one of them landing at the top of the tall phragmites where we could easily scope him. From here we began checking a series of Salt Pannes along the Odiel Marshes where there were a number of waders including a pair of Curlew Sandpipers amongst dozens of Dunlin and Redshank; good numbers of Red Knots some of them in fine breeding plumage; several Bar-tailed Godwit and a Common Sandpiper. Russ spotted a white object move in the water and go behind the low vegetation. Once it emerged it turned out to be our only 2 Shelducks of the trips. Marsh Harriers would occasionally be seen quartering the marshes.

Along the breakwater we had Little Terns, Turnstones, Kentish Plovers and Sanderlings on a rapidly decreasing sand bar; more Bar-tailed Godwits and Black-headed and Yellow-legged Gulls in the water. On the boons we located a number of 2nd year Audouin's Gulls and would later have wonderful looks at adults roosting on the edge of a pond along with Sandwich Terns, Collared Pranticole's, Lesser-black Backed and Black-headed Gulls. On this beautiful day the ocean was once again calm and nothing of interest could be located at sea. In spite of this, this was a wonderful trip with visits to some of southern Spain's historical sites, sleepy villages and extraordinary scenery to go along with 193 species of birds, and a good assortment of butterflies, reptiles and mammals.