



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT EXTREMADURA 28TH JANUARY — 1ST FEBRUARY 2019

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MONDAY 28th January 2019 – *Sunny spells, freshening breeze, IIC*

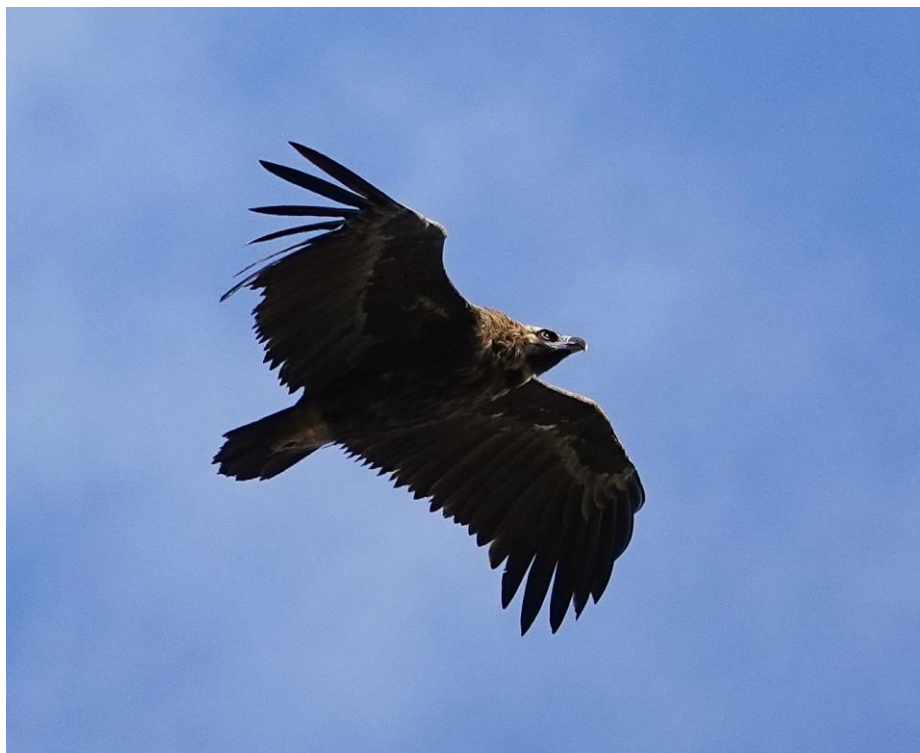
Following a smooth outward flight, we arrived slightly ahead of schedule at Madrid, picking up our vehicle just before midday. While attempting to negotiate a recalcitrant exit barrier at the vehicle hire compound, we caught sight of a pair of **Monk Parakeets** (with one carrying nest material), a naturalised species which has multiplied rapidly in Madrid, with an estimated population of over 10,000 in the city.

Having finally escaped the rental compound, we headed south-west from the city, noting White Storks and Red Kites, even before we had left the city. Both these species would subsequently prove to be common and widespread throughout the trip, sighted frequently each day. Further sightings from the vehicle included House Sparrow, Common Magpie, **Spotless Starling**, **Crested Lark**, Feral Pigeon, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Yellow-legged Gull**.

About 90 minutes out from the airport, we pulled in at the services just outside Oropesa, where we would pause for lunch. From the services car park area, we noted **Black Redstart**, **Iberian Grey Shrike**, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel and a few very distant **Griffon Vultures**. Suitably refreshed, we drove a few km north-west on the local road towards Las Ventas de San Julian. A roadside field (where it appeared muck had recently been spread) held good numbers of **Northern Lapwings** (very common in the region in winter), Black-headed Gulls (plus a lone Lesser Black-backed Gull), White Wagtails, **Spotless Starlings**, European Goldfinches and Common Linnets. A single **Cattle Egret** flew in and landed on a fence next to some farm buildings. On reaching the first area of dehesa (a multifunctional, agrosilvopastoral system and cultural landscape typical of areas of southern and central Spain), we were delighted to happen upon our first **Common Cranes**, with several treating us to a close flypast. In addition, a **Western Marsh Harrier** and another couple of **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were also observed. We briefly drove the minor road which heads north from the services, which proved less productive, before re-joining the motorway to continue our journey.

After about half an hour we again exited the motorway and parked up by the Parque Ornitologico de Arrocampo visitor centre at Saucedilla, where we would spend some birding the edge of this noteworthy wetland reserve, which was created as a coolant for the Almaraz Nuclear Power Plant. We soon saw Little Egret, Great Cormorant, Gadwall, Eurasian Coot, **Common Snipe**, European Greenfinch, European Goldfinch, Eurasian Jackdaw, **Cetti's Warbler**, Common Chiffchaff (numerous here) and a rather distant **Western Swamphen**. Even better was a **Black-winged Kite** hunting nearby in the strengthening breeze, with two **Black Vultures** low overhead. We decided to take a track heading west from the town in an attempt (unsuccessful) to relocate the kite, but we did find a flock of 20 or so **Iberian Magpies** being disturbed by a **Western Marsh Harrier**, and a Eurasian Hoopoe. Six Western Swamphens gave excellent views on a small inlet and a lone Eurasian Teal was added. In the same area we stopped to view a shallow farm pool, just across the road from a small lake (where Observatorio 5 is situated). The pool was busy with birds, including **Green Sandpiper** (with more of these also seen in a roadside ditch), **Northern Shoveler**, Little Grebe, Mallard, Common Snipe, **Spotless Starling**, **Crested Lark**, Common Chaffinch, **Iberian Magpie** and an attendant Western Marsh Harrier. The lake itself was relatively quiet, with only Green Sandpiper and Little Grebe found, before we returned to the main road and drove the short distance to the causeway over an arm of the main reservoir. Here we logged two **Barn Swallows**, several Meadow Pipits, **Iberian Grey Shrike**, two distant **Griffon Vultures** and a rather skulking **Girl Bunting**. By

now a rather stiff wind had set in and we opted to head for our hotel, arriving around 18:00, anticipating a tasty meal of authentic local produce, always a feature of this stay.



Black Vulture, 28th January

TUESDAY 29th January 2019 – Mostly cloudy and cool, with a strengthening wind through the day, 8C

Birds heard or seen by the hotel while preparing to head out for the day following breakfast included Eurasian Blackbird, Great Tit, Eurasian Wren, Eurasian Blackcap and **Sardinian Warbler**. We hit the road at about 08:20 and headed for the area of plains between Trujillo and Santa Marta de Magasca, making our first stop at an obvious bend in the road, which affords a good vista over the area looking east and north-east. Careful scanning revealed a group of 12 **Little Bustards**, being quite well-camouflaged against the grass in the somewhat murky conditions. A **Green Sandpiper** was on a small pool and other birds popping up near the vehicle included Common Kestrel, **Thekla's Lark**, **Common Reed Bunting**, **Black Redstart** and **European Stonechat** - the latter two species would prove to be frequent and widespread during the trip. Good numbers of **Northern Lapwings** and a few **European Golden Plovers** were also picked up, with our first **Calandra Larks** easily identified in flight owing to the blackish underwing and distinct white trailing edge combination. The area across the road, where the dehesa gave way to more open fields, was busy with small birds, most numerous hundreds of **Spanish Sparrows**, but also 40 **Calandra Larks**, **Spotless Starlings**, **Corn Buntings** (another very common species in the region), **Iberian Magpies**, a few **European Serins**, **Collared Doves** and **Common Woodpigeons**. A couple each of **Eurasian Hoopoe** and **Iberian Grey Shrike** were also around, while a Red Fox walked boldly through and optimistically attempted to catch a Common Magpie. A brief appearance by the sun allowed much better views of the **Little Bustards**, with the males looking especially resplendent.

Climbing aboard the vehicle, we continued in a north-westerly direction. After a short distance a group of **Great Bustards** was spotted in flight, appearing to land in fields close to a nearby drover's road. Luckily, we were able to intercept the bustards – seven males in total – along this track, with great views obtained, including one in full display. What magnificent birds they are. By now the first of the day's **Red Kites** were up, but better still was the two much larger raptors picked up in flight to the north-west: a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**! Luckily both landed in full view perched on either side of a large tree, allowing an opportunity to view the white leading edges to the wings, white

shoulder patches and pale golden nape-shawl of adult birds, albeit at some distance. Two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** gave a couple of flypasts, but never very close, with a few Eurasian Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and **European Stonechats** also seen.



Great Bustards, 29th January

Allowing ourselves a final look at the **Great Bustards**, we continued on our route, stopping awhile at Santa Marta for refreshments, before pulling in by the bridge over Rio Magasca, just north of the village. Here we soon picked up six **Eurasian Crag Martins**, which showed very nicely, plus two **Rock Buntings**, **Cirl Bunting**, several **Sardinian Warblers**, **European Serins**, **European Robins**, **Eurasian Blackbirds**, **Eurasian Blue Tit** and two **Common House Martins**.

Our next stop was also a river crossing, this time over the Almonte, just south of Monroy, where **Common Sandpiper** was on the river, with both **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** in groups overhead. Several pairs or small groups of **Red-legged Partridges** were observed from the vehicle in the general area, too. Further on again, we stopped at another river crossing, where lunch would be taken. Here we were delighted to locate three **Black Wheatears**, with prolonged views on both sides of the rocky river; always a good bird to see. A **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** shot through in pursuit of a **Eurasian Blackbird**, while vultures and **Red Kites** were frequently up in the air.

Next, we headed east, via the outskirts of Cáceres, and along the N521, before turning off onto the minor road which forms the south-western section of the 'Santa Marta Loop'. Driving a few km along here, the best sighting was a flock of around 60 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** over, with nine **Common Ravens** and a flock of **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** also around.

To end the day, we headed south to the town of Montánchez, where we somehow managed to navigate the maze of increasingly tight and winding streets which lead uphill up to the impressive castle, perched proudly above the surrounding mixed landscape. Alas, we were unable to locate any of the hoped-for **Alpine Accentors**, which can occur here, although the now fairly strong, cold wind wasn't helping matters. However, we did record a brief **Rock Sparrow**, **Sardinian Warblers**, **Eurasian Blackcaps** and several **Black Redstarts** to show for our efforts.

WEDNESDAY 30th January 2019 – *Hazy sun first thing, then cloudy, light rain from mid-afternoon, 10C*

Most of today would be spent in the environs of Monfragüe National Park, roughly an hour's drive to the north. Setting off at 08:15, we took the EX-208 out of Trujillo, noting several groups of **Common Cranes** in the dehesa. A little further north again, the road crosses the Almonte at a scenic location, where we stopped to scan from the bridge. Four **Eurasian Crag Martins** were quickly located, followed by **Green Sandpiper**, **Grey Wagtail**, **White Wagtails**, **Meadow Pipits**, **Cetti's Warblers**, **Common Chiffchaffs**, **Barn Swallow** and two **Cirl Buntings**.

Our first port of call in the park proper would be to the Castillo. Parking as close to the access as possible, we made our way up the steep series of steps which lead to the Castillo itself. The trees and scrub held numerous **Eurasian Blackcaps**, a few **European Serins**, **European Robins**, **Black Redstarts**, **Song Thrushes** and one or two **Eurasian Jays**, with **Eurasian Crag Martins** on the wing. By the time we were about half way up, the **Griffon Vultures** began to appear from the nearby colony, with many circling at eye level, affording incredible views. Once at the top, yet more **Griffons** drifted into view, admixed with a few **Black Vultures**. At one point, well over 100 vultures were up, presumably in readiness for the day's feeding forays; a spectacular sight at close quarters. A male **Blue Rock Thrush** was located below the viewpoint and a flock of **Long-tailed Tits** moved through.



Griffon Vulture, 30th January

Our next stop was planned to be at the famous Peña Falcón viewpoint, directly opposite and below the vulture colony, but not before a comfort/refreshment break at Villareal de San Carlos (the only settlement in the park). Of note at the bridge over the Tagus were a flock of genuine-looking **Rock**

Doves and several hundred **Common House Martins**; a surprisingly early migrant here in Spain. Heading back over the bridge and parking at the Peña Falcón we enjoyed tremendous views of the **Griffon Vulture** colony, with an immature **Golden Eagle** appearing in view twice and a **Peregrine Falcon** appearing tiny in comparison. A **Black Stork** was dozing on a cliff face opposite; small numbers of this species winter in the region. A group of 11 **Grey Herons** were at rest on a nearby rockface and here we also enjoyed three **Blue Rock Thrushes** and a very vocal **Red-legged Partridge**.



Black Stork & Red-legged Partridge, 30th January

Moving further into the park, we stopped for lunch at Mirador De La Higuera, noting a **Hawfinch** and a **Grey Wagtail** on the way, near the dam. Looking north from the mirador we spotted a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** up over their territory, staying in view for at least twenty minutes. A large feeding flock of Great Cormorants on the river must have totalled at least 350. A little further on we called in at the Portrilla del Tietar, another viewpoint taking in a craggy **Griffon Vulture** colony. **Blue Rock Thrush** and **European Serin** were also noted here.



Griffon Vulture, 30th January

Continuing north, we made our way through an attractive area of Cork Oak forest, where **Common Crane**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Cirl Bunting** and **Iberian Magpie** were logged, before turning right towards Serrajón and heading for the motorway, where we would drive south, exiting at the junction for Torrecillas de la Tiesa. A few km out of Torrecillas we turned right onto the minor road which traverses Belén Plain. Here we would drive slowly, frequently stopping to scan for steppe-loving birds. Alas no bustards or sandgrouse were located, somewhat concerning at what used to be a reliable location for such species. However, there was enough to keep us interested and, with rain setting in, we were glad to be able to bird from the vehicle. A group of raptors at a carcass comprised three **Black Vultures**, two **Griffon Vultures** and eight **Red Kites**, with several **Common Buzzards** also noted nearby. **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were frequently encountered roadside, including one feasting on a dead snake. A farm pool held two **Black-winged Stilts** and a **Green Sandpiper**, with **Northern Lapwings**, **European Golden Plovers**, a flock of **Calandra Larks**, **Thekla's Larks**, **Spanish Sparrows**, **European Stonechats**, **Common Linnets** and **European Goldfinches** also around.



Iberian Grey Shrike, 30th January

Arriving back at Trujillo via Belén village, we opted for one final stop for the day, at a small pool in the town, near the bullring, known as Estanque de San Lázaro. Expectations were low for this rather unpromising urban waterbody in a small public park, but we were pleasantly surprised to find no fewer than 11 **Little Ringed Plovers**, two **Water Pipits**, two **Black-winged Stilts**, **Little Grebes**, **Eurasian Coots** and **Common Moorhens**, as well as the anticipated gaggle of **Mallards**. By now the rain was falling more steadily and we made the short drive back to our hotel, feeling we had made the most of the day.

THURSDAY 31st January 2019 – *Mostly cloudy and cool, with a strengthening wind through the day, 8C*

A change of scenery today, as we headed to south to explore some of the region's waterbodies and rice fields. Leaving the hotel at around 08:15, we took the road in the direction of Zorita (noting an early rising **Black Vulture** on the way), where we turned off towards Alcollarín. Here a reservoir, completed as recently as 2014, has quickly become established among the premier wetlands in the region, possibly owing to its overall relatively shallow depth profile and varied surrounding habitats. We first pulled in to view from the dam. Being the deepest part of the lake, this can often be the least

productive section. However, on this occasion the water levels were remarkably low, presumably as a result of a reported absence of rain during the previous two months, and we were greeted by huge rafts of **Northern Shovelers** at this southern end of the lake, perhaps around 3,500 in total. Although the rafts themselves were almost purely single species, scanning this half of the lake also revealed **Black-necked Grebe**, **Great Crested Grebe**, **Eurasian Teal**, **Gadwall**, **Tufted Duck**, **Great Cormorant** and the two common gull species. A further mass of wildfowl could be seen very distantly at the north end of the lake, but too far to allow identification to species level, and with no access to that area, sadly we would have to leave it that way. A look at the extensive shorelines, while still at the dam, produced a **Black Stork** (on the west shore), **Great White Egret**, **Grey Heron**, **Common Sandpiper** and **Eurasian Hoopoe**. A **Woodlark** was singing close by, eventually flying over hotly pursued by another. Driving up the lake we parked up at the picnic area at the top end of the eastern arm of the central lake, where a separate smaller waterbody has also been created. We quickly got on to a large raptor which was feasting on an unidentified carcass on the shore of this smaller lake - an adult **Bonelli's Eagle**! Slight panic all round, but we all got onto the bird before it flew off into a nearby tree, still giving great 'scope views. Eventually it relocated to some rocks among trees somewhat further away, where it remained. After this excitement, we scanned around the surrounding area, although the eastern arm of the lake was totally dry. Sightings here included **Eurasian Spoonbills** (three flew past, two on the distant lake shore), two **Egyptian Geese**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Northern Lapwings**, two **Barn Swallows** and **Cetti's Warbler**. Retracing our route, a flock of **Iberian Magpies** moved through and a **Peregrine Falcon** was perched on the shoreline.



Bonelli's Eagle & Hen Harrier, 31st January

Leaving the lake, we headed for Campo Lugar, where we took the rough road heading east across an area of plains. We didn't see much here other than **Common Ravens**, **Red Kites** and an **Iberian Grey Shrike**, although the weather didn't help, having closed in somewhat. Next, we opted for a stop for refreshments at a café in Madrigalejo, where dozens of **Common Cranes** were bugling from the fields across the road. Suitably bolstered, we took the minor road heading east, which passes through some solar farms and into an area of rice fields. All three egrets were scattered around, most numerous **Cattle Egrets**, with big flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** frequently observed. Waders here included seven **Spotted Redshanks**, a **Common Greenshank**, nine **Black-tailed Godwits** and numerous **Common Snipe**. A flock of seven wary *anser* **Greylag Geese** were present, along with a smattering of **Common Cranes** and a couple of **Western Marsh Harriers**. Unfortunately, the ditches alongside the fields appeared to have been relatively recently cleared out, rather scuppering our chances of the hoped-for **Bluethroats**, which are known to occur.

Moving on, we took the service road which leads to Embalse de Sierra Brava, which was relatively quiet today, holding mainly **Great Cormorants**, **Great Crested Grebes** and the odd **Common**

Sandpiper. Rejoining the EX355 north of Madrigalejo, we pulled up at a former gravel pit, now a pool surrounded by eucalypts, where lunch would be taken in the vehicle, dodging another shower, which was moving through. Following lunch, we opted to drive some of the tracks which criss-cross the rice fields here. Six **Common Ravens** and a **Western Marsh Harrier** with prey were noted, while **Common Cranes** numbered into the hundreds, making a splendid sight and sound. We eventually had decent views of the two hyperactive naturalised finches which inhabit the vegetated ditches in the area: **Common Waxbill** and **Red Avadavat**, an African and an Indian species, respectively. Once again, **Spanish Sparrows** were numerous, but we also picked up **Eurasian Tree Sparrow**, **Common Reed Bunting** and **Water Pipit** long here. Yet more **Western Marsh Harriers** were seen, but better still a beautiful male **Hen Harrier** drifted through.

Continuing south along the EX355, we next pulled off for another area of rice fields beyond Vegas Altas, where several hundred more **Common Cranes** and plenty of **White Storks** were present, but not a great deal else. Continuing our journey, we briefly joined the N430 main road east, before exiting at Obando. Just north of the town was a spectacular gathering of maybe 5,000 **Common Cranes** close to the road, truly wonderful to see. Here we also noted a flock of around 70 **Stock Doves** in the same fields, not a particularly easy species to come across in the region. A short distance up the road from here is Embalse de Moheda Alta, where we scrambled up a steep bank to view the waterbody. The majority of the wildfowl were **Norther Shovelers** and **Mallards**, although a single **Common Shelduck** was an addition to our list. A lone **Eurasian Spoonbill** was present and the only wader logged was **Common Sandpiper**.



Common Cranes, 31st January

From here our intention was to head to the edge of Sierra de las Villuercas, a mountain range to the west of Guadalupe. However, as we approached the area, heavy rain set in, necessitating a change plan, and we diverted along the road through Logrosan. Luckily, as we neared Zorita the rain eased and we opted to spend our remaining time revisiting Embalse de Alcollarín, where we had begun the day. Approaching the entrance, we were treated to some nice views of **European Serins**. Stopping halfway along the lake we were delighted to locate another **Bonelli's Eagle**, this time a subadult, stood on the grass just up from the lake shore. It seems likely that the site is becoming an established wintering site for the species. At the eastern arm we noted several **Common Kingfishers**, before

finally having another look at the huge rafts of **Northern Shovelers**, where we teased out a pair of **Eurasian Wigeon** and at least 10 **Black-necked Grebes**.

FRIDAY 1st February 2019 – *Fresh to strong south-westerly wind, 8C*

Saying our goodbyes to our hosts, we headed north, with time enough to make a few stops on our way to Madrid. Our first destination was the large area of heath near Jaraicejo. Here we soon located several **Dartford Warblers**, with **Woodlark** and **Thekla's Larks** also evident. Continuing along the same road took us over the pass at Casas de Miravete. At over 600m, this location was unpleasantly cold in the strong winds and extensive felling seemed to have taken place, so we didn't linger.

After a comfort break at the services near Almaraz, we opted to spend our remaining available time at nearby Arrocampo. Stopping at the causeway, we noticed dozens of **Barn Swallows** feeding over the adjacent pool, but nothing else unusual. Parking at the visitor centre, we were somewhat surprised to find 10 **Black-crowned Night Herons** roosting in a large fig tree. This species is rather uncommon in the winter here, as is **Little Bittern**, one of which was seen briefly flying into a nearby reedbed. Also noted here were three showy **Western Swamphens** and two close **Black Vultures**.



Black-crowned Night Heron & Western Swamphen, 1st February

The journey back to Madrid was uneventful, with a male **Hen Harrier** being the pick of the sightings, and we arrived back to a snowy Gatwick just a few minutes behind schedule, before continuing our onward journeys.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

- 1 Greylag Goose
- 2 Egyptian Goose
- 3 Common Shelduck
- 4 Northern Shoveler
- 5 Gadwall
- 6 Eurasian Wigeon
- 7 Mallard
- 8 Eurasian Teal
- 9 Tufted Duck
- 10 Red-legged Partridge
- 11 Little Grebe
- 12 Great Crested Grebe

- 13 Black-necked Grebe
- 14 Black Stork
- 15 White Stork
- 16 Great Cormorant
- 17 Little Bittern
- 18 Black-crowned Night Heron
- 19 Grey Heron
- 20 Great White Egret
- 21 Little Egret
- 22 Cattle Egret
- 23 Eurasian Spoonbill
- 24 Black-winged Kite
- 25 Black Vulture
- 26 Griffon Vulture
- 27 Spanish Imperial Eagle
- 28 Golden Eagle
- 29 Bonelli's Eagle
- 30 Western Marsh Harrier
- 31 Hen Harrier
- 32 Eurasian Sparrowhawk
- 33 Red Kite
- 34 Common Buzzard
- 35 Great Bustard
- 36 Little Bustard
- 37 Water Rail [H]
- 38 Western Swamphen
- 39 Common Moorhen
- 40 Eurasian Coot
- 41 Common Crane
- 42 Black-winged Stilt
- 43 European Golden Plover
- 44 Northern Lapwing
- 45 Little Ringed Plover
- 46 Black-tailed Godwit
- 47 Common Snipe
- 48 Common Sandpiper
- 49 Green Sandpiper
- 50 Spotted Redshank
- 51 Common Greenshank
- 52 Black-headed Gull
- 53 Yellow-legged Gull
- 54 Lesser Black-backed Gull
- 55 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
- 56 Black-bellied Sandgrouse
- 57 Rock Dove
- 58 Stock Dove
- 59 Common Woodpigeon
- 60 Collared Dove
- 61 Eurasian Hoopoe
- 62 Common Kingfisher
- 63 Common Kestrel
- 64 Peregrine Falcon
- 65 Monk Parakeet
- 66 Iberian Grey Shrike
- 67 Eurasian Jay

68 Iberian Magpie
69 Common Magpie
70 Eurasian Jackdaw
71 Common Raven
72 Calandra Lark
73 Woodlark
74 Eurasian Skylark
75 Thekla's Lark
76 Crested Lark
77 Barn Swallow
78 Eurasian Crag Martin
79 Common House Martin
80 Eurasian Blue Tit
81 Great Tit
82 Long-tailed Tit
83 Eurasian Wren
84 Cetti's Warbler
85 Common Chiffchaff
86 Eurasian Blackcap
87 Sardinian Warbler
88 Dartford Warbler
90 European Robin
91 Black Redstart
92 Blue Rock Thrush
93 European Stonechat
94 Black Wheatear
95 Eurasian Blackbird
96 Song Thrush
97 Spotless Starling
98 Grey Wagtail
99 White Wagtail
100 Meadow Pipit
101 Water Pipit
102 Cirl Bunting
103 Rock Bunting
104 Common Reed Bunting
105 Corn Bunting
106 Common Chaffinch
107 Hawfinch
108 European Greenfinch
109 Common Linnet
110 European Goldfinch
111 European Serin
112 House Sparrow
113 Spanish Sparrow
114 Eurasian Tree Sparrow
115 Rock Sparrow
116 Common Waxbill
117 Red Avadavat

OTHER WILDLIFE

1 Rabbit
2 Red Deer
3 Red Fox