



TOUR REPORT
EXTREMADURA – LAND OF THE CONQUISTADORS
9TH – 15TH APRIL 2025

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WEDNESDAY 9TH APRIL – *Bright, sunny, max 27C*

It was an early start – we had arranged to meet at 4.15am at the BA check in at Heathrow Terminal 5, although it took a bit of time before we all found each other. Then we were quickly through and on our way. The flight left on time and arrived into Madrid a little early. It was a long journey in to baggage reclaim, a walk and then a train ride, and when we arrived most of our bags were waiting for us already. One bag hadn't appeared though. We had been at the back on the plane and were last off and it slowly became apparent that there was no more luggage being delivered. It wasn't easy to find anyone to ask, but we eventually located the Iberia desk where we could report it missing and leave details of the hotel where we were staying. Hoping it would be found and catch up with us quickly, we made our way out and across to the car park. Collecting the minibus from the car hire company was unusually quick and we were finally on our way. Or so we thought. There was a problem with one of the front seat belts and we found we needed a mini USB cable for the satnav, so we stopped at the first filling station we found and thankfully both those issues were easily resolved.

There were a few birds in the outskirts of Madrid, mainly feral **Pigeons** and **Woodpigeons**, **Maggies** and **Starlings**, with some of the larger flocks possibly lingering **Common Starlings**. As we got out of the city, we found a few **Red Kites** circling up by the road. Further on, there were **Black Kites** too, **White Storks** in the fields and on their nests, and lots of **Corn Buntings** on the wires. A couple of **Red-rumped Swallows** were seen briefly as we passed. We stopped again for lunch at the motorway services at Oropesa. As we got out of the minibus, a **Black Vulture** drifted over. There were a couple of **Booted Eagles** up too and a **Lesser Kestrel** flew low overhead. We could see a few more **Lesser Kestrels** over the castle in the town beyond. A **Marsh Harrier** was displaying high above us and then swooped quickly down into some nearby reeds. A **Crested Lark** fluttered up singing. We ordered sandwiches and coffee – the tortilla sandwich was a particularly popular option – and a couple of the group had an ice cream. After lunch, as we had lost a bit of time at the airport in Madrid, we decided to press on to the reserve at the Embalse de Arrocampo. Three **Bee-eaters** drifted over the car park calling as we walked back outside and several **Griffon Vultures** were circling up as we got back onto the motorway.



Great Spotted Cuckoo & Purple Heron – at Arrocampo

It was only about half an hour to Saucedilla and we parked at the Information Centre. There were lots of **Swallows** and **House Martins** flying round and a two or three **Black Kites** drifted over. After sorting out cameras and scopes, we went for a short walk down to Hide 1. A **Lesser Emperor** dragonfly was flying round over the channel next to the park and a couple of **Bath White** butterflies flew past over the grass, which looks very long already after the very wet winter. From next to the hide, we saw several **Purple Herons** flying in and out of the reeds and eventually got some nice views of one perched out in the open. Both **Little Bittern** and **Spoonbill** were less obliging, single of both only flying up briefly before disappearing back in, and a **Great White Egret** flew over. We could hear **Western (Purple) Swampheens** calling from time to time but they

refused to show themselves and several **Gull-billed Terns** flew round in the distance. A Reed Warbler was singing and flicked up into the top of the reeds below us, **Cetti's Warblers** shouted and a **Sardinian Warbler** flew back and forth. The highlight of our stop here was a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoos** which flew right past us, then came back the other way pursued by a **Magpie**.

After scanning from here for a while, we decided to drive round to other side. We had a quick scan of the pools by the road on the way. The first we checked is getting very overgrown and all we found was a single **Spanish Pond Turtle**. Further on, we found lots of **Cattle Egrets**, a **Little Egret** and another **Purple Heron** by another. We stopped by Hide 5 and walked up the path to view the lake beyond. The water level here was surprisingly not so high and there was quite a bit of exposed mud. We found several waders, **Common** and **Green Sandpipers**, a couple of **Greenshank**, **Little Ringed Plovers** and one or two **Black-winged Stilts**. A **Glossy Ibis** flew up from the back and another was standing on a dead branch in the water, next to some more **Cattle Egrets**. There was a pair of **Shelduck** on the water and a couple of **Egyptian Geese** and a **Moorhen** on the bank behind. When we heard a **Great Reed Warbler** singing we were surprised to find that it was coming from a holm oak out in the field behind. We eventually had some glimpses of it in the leaves.

We had hoped we might find **Black-winged Kite** here, but it was perhaps too early and warm still, in the middle of the afternoon. Then, as we drove back round, we noticed one flying through the trees by the road. It drifted off quickly away from us but landed in a dead tree in the distance. We took a side track and eventually found a place from where we could stop and get out to view the tree, but it took off again just as we got the scope set up and flew round before disappearing off behind some trees. There were three **Woodchat Shrikes** here now to look at too. A **Nightingale** was singing in the bushes nearby.

Everyone was tired after the long day and very early start, so we drove on now to our hotel for the night in Madronera. After checking in, we had some time to get sorted out before dinner and managed to buy some toiletries in the local shop in the village for those whose bag hadn't arrived. Dinner wasn't served until 8.30pm at the earliest, Spanish-time, so after we had eaten we had a quick run through the day's list before turning in.

THURSDAY 10TH APRIL – *Cloudy, bright, some sunny intervals, max 23C*

There was some good news this morning that the lost bag which hadn't made it to the airport in Madrid had been found and would be sent on tomorrow. In all the excitement, someone (the leader!) forgot to put their camera in the minibus but thankfully we hadn't gone far so we could go back and pick it up. As we drove out of Madronera, our first **Iberian Magpie** flew across the road and landed briefly in a tree on the verge, followed shortly after by a **Hoopoe**.



Corn Bunting & Crested Lark – common on the steppes

When we got out onto the steppes just before Santa Marta, we parked and climbed up to the top of a low hill. A couple of **Spanish Sparrows** flew out of the field behind and the female landed briefly on a low bush. An **Iberian Grey Shrike** was perched on a distant dead branch so we got that in the scope. As ever, there were **Corn Buntings** everywhere, a **Crested Lark** perched nicely on the fence behind us and a couple of **Calandra Larks** chased each other round behind the pool in front. A **Common Quail** was calling but our suspicions from yesterday were confirmed – the grass is very long already – and it was well hidden. A **Little Grebe** laughed at us from the pool and a couple of **Ravens** flew round. Scanning the trees behind, we found a **Common Cuckoo**. It was trying to fly down to feed in the low grass but kept getting mobbed by a couple of **Corn Buntings**.

Moving on, we turned onto the drovers' track a little further up. A **Calandra Lark** was perched nicely on one of the fence posts by the track. As we parked and got out, the first thing that struck us was the sound – larks singing all around us, particularly the **Calandra Larks** with their great mimicry (Green Sandpiper is a bit of a favourite to copy). Another **Quail** was calling behind. So different from the lack of sound these days in the farmed countryside back home, which unfortunately we seem to have ruined. It is always a sad reminder here of what it used to be like in UK. One of the group immediately picked up a distant **Great Bustard** on the top of the hill, standing on a small pile of rocks and soil. Several small groups of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** flew round calling. The first couple landed in the grass out of view, but then three landed on a small cattle track distantly on the ridge, where we could just see them walking in and out of the vegetation from time to time. A female **Montagu's Harrier** flew across behind us.



Calandra Lark & Pin-tailed Sandgrouse – out on the steppes

Down the track a short way, we heard a **Little Bustard** out in front of us and while we went back to get the other scopes one of the group managed to see it briefly up towards the top of the ridge. Now, despite knowing exactly where it was, we continued to scan back and forth and there was no further sign. It had simply melted away into the long grass which didn't look that long!

It was a bit cloudy this morning and slow to really warm up. Good weather for the steppes as the heat haze was not so bad but it was a while before the raptors started to circle up. There were the usual **Black Kites** and a single **Red Kite**. Then eventually a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** appeared and landed in the top of a tree out on the steppes. Nice views through the scopes, an adult, we could see its golden head and white shoulders. We heard **Bee-eaters** calling overhead from time to time but they were mostly very high until one swept in right behind us and low over our heads. Two **Sand Martins** flew through, presumably migrants on their way north. There were only a few butterflies out today, **Bath White**, **Clouded Yellow** and a **Small Heath**. A **Montpellier Snake** slithered across the track behind us.

We kept looking back, hoping we could find the **Little Bustard** again but there was no further sign. When a **Roe Deer** appeared at the top of the ridge, it ran across and past where the **Little Bustard** had been. We scanned

back and there was the **Little Bustard's** head and neck sticking up out of the grass again, just a few metres right of where it was seen first. It had been in there all along. Unfortunately, it disappeared back down into the grass again almost immediately, before everyone could get chance to see it. It quickly became clear it was not going to show itself again and we hadn't heard it again since earlier. It was nearly midday so we decided to move on.

Driving through Santa Marta, we were going to stop in the layby above the river for a scan but there was a van parked there, so we thought we would continue on to the bridge. As we continued round the corner we could see two minibuses down there already, so we pulled in to the exit of the layby and got out for a scan. There were several **Serins** flying round singing as we got out and a brief **Kingfisher** down on the river below before flying off downstream. It had just warmed up enough for the vultures to start circling up and immediately we found a single **Black Vulture** in with a small group of **Griffons**. A **Short-toed Eagle** came in low from behind and flew right past us, circling out over the valley in front of us, with a second further down the valley too. Then a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** appeared. We had a good enough view as it circled the other side but then it turned and started to fly straight towards us. Now we could really appreciate the white leading edge to its wings. It came right over to our side of the valley and low past us before disappearing behind the trees. Stunning. A second **Spanish Imperial Eagle** then circled up further down the valley and the first flew back round high above it.



Short-toed Eagle & Spanish Imperial Eagle – flew over

It was time for lunch. The other minibuses had left the bridge (one had come up to the layby to watch the eagles), so we drove down and parked in the small pull-in now. There were lots of **Crag Martins** and **House Martins** flying round overhead and going in to check out the nests under the lip of the bridge. Two **Bee-eaters** flew along the valley calling. A couple of **White Wagtails** were down on the rocks along with several **Spanish Pond Turtles** sunning themselves. Looking at photos later, we realised there was a **European Pond Turtle** in amongst them too. Lunch included a particularly delicious red pepper, tuna and egg salad, which was interrupted when two **Black Storks** appeared, circling further up the valley.

After lunch, as we drove on through the rocky dehesa beyond, a pair of **Thekla's Larks** were feeding by the side of the road and one flew up and landed on the fence. Then a **Hoopoe** flew across in front of us and landed on the fence with food in its bill, posing obligingly. A little further on, an **Iberian Grey Shrike** was on the wires. After a while we came out again into more open steppe. The telegraph posts along here each have a **Roller** nest box on and we didn't have to go far before we found the first of several **Rollers** on the wires. It was posing nicely and as we pulled up to photograph it, we noticed a **Little Owl** on a rock right next to us, just beyond the fence. The **Little Owl** looked particularly angry, perhaps as we didn't drive straight on, and it stayed there for some time staring at us before it flew back to some more rocks behind. There were more **Rollers** further on and lots of **Jackdaws** which had taken over several of the boxes. A male **Common Kestrel** was perched on the

wires by one of the boxes. We scanned the plains as we drove on and turned onto a side road where we parked in front of a field gate and got out.

Before we had even set up the scopes, we could see a **Great Bustard** sat down in the grass, a smart male with rusty neck and white whiskers. Then scanning across we found another four, a younger male walking around in the open. We got them both in the scopes for a closer look. While we were watching them, one of the group found some black and red leafhoppers and some soldier beetles in the tall grass. Then we noticed there were even more **Great Bustards** further down, back towards the road, so we decided to drive back and see if we could see them closer. Down towards the junction, we had another count and we reckoned there were at least 14 **Great Bustards** in the one field in total. There was a bit of a ridge in the ground so we weren't sure we would be able to see them from the main road, but we drove round we found we could see some of them. We had great views of a young male which was trying to hide on the back of a pile of straw and then of several young males in the field which were just visible on the top of the ridge.



Roller & Great Bustard – out on the steppes

A **Short-toed Lark** flew in and landed in the edge of the field ahead of us, so when we had finished watching the **Great Bustards** we drove on slowly. Unfortunately it flew off as we got up to it, but then we looked across to see a harrier flying past. It was a melanic **Montagu's Harrier** – small numbers of this dark form are found here and an interesting bird to see so we tried to follow it up along the road. When it flew back away over the field and dropped down out of view, we found another female **Montagu's Harrier** further up. We parked in a layby and stopped to scan. The female flew up hunting over the field behind, then one or two lovely grey males flew across in front of us. There were several **Lesser Kestrels** hovering out over the ridge behind us.

After watching the harriers for a while, we made our way back down to the side road and continued on past the gate and out onto the open plains beyond. A large flock of a couple of hundred **Spanish Sparrows** were feeding in a grassy field. There were lots of larks feeding and dustbathing on the track ahead of us including several **Short-toed Larks**. A pair flew up and then landed in the field right below the track where we could see them feeding in the short grass and flowers. Further on, we found two or three **Blue-headed Wagtails** around the edge of a small pool in a recently ploughed field. Migrants stopping off on their way further north. We kept scanning likely looking fields and on one with seemingly suitable short grass we found what looked like the heads of three distant **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. When we got out to set up the scope they took off and a whole load more came up than we had realised, about thirty in total. They landed again but further back still. Further on, we pulled up by an old barn where several **Lesser Kestrels** were coming and going from the holes in the roof. A male was perched on the fence ahead of us but flew off as soon as we lifted the cameras. A **Hoopoe** was perched on a gatepost calling, the other side of the road. We continued on a little further before turning round and coming back.

Still scanning the fields, we found some **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** now, we could just see their heads sticking up out of the grass. Unfortunately no one else could see them, so eventually we decided we had to get out and try to get the scope on them. Despite being a fair distance away still, they took off just as we set up the scope. Fourteen of them, they disappeared off into the distance. A little further up, we found a female **Montagu's Harrier** hunting out over the grass and then a male, close to the road. It was time to start making our way back. We had a bit of time before dinner, so we did the day's list first on the terrace, in the sun with the **Common Swifts** flying round overhead.

FRIDAY 11TH APRIL – *Rain on & off, bright & sunny later, max 20C*

It had rained overnight and when we met at the minibus after breakfast it was starting to spit with rain again. It stopped for a while as we drove down towards Campo Lugar, up over the steppes. The grass in the fields looked very long here this year but we kept scanning as we drove along slowly. There were not so many larks singing today and even the **Corn Buntings** didn't seem to be as noisy, presumably due to the weather. A male **Montagu's Harrier** was hunting out over the grass and just beyond we found a male **Great Bustard**. We pulled up in a nearby gateway and set up the scopes. It was not displaying but was strutting around with its tail raised. After a while, it walked out of view behind a small ridge. Scanning the surrounding fields, we couldn't see anything else but a couple of **Ravens** and we could hear a **Quail** calling. It was grey and cold, with a chilly breeze blowing across so we retreated back into the minibus. Further on, a **Common Buzzard** flew across the road in front of us. We stopped again in another gateway, just over the brow of the hill where we figured it would be less exposed to the wind. There was a bit more activity from the **Calandra Larks** singing and fluttering up here but still it was rather quiet. We couldn't see anything on the pylons or around the small pool out in the field across the road. Moving on, we stopped for a **Roller** on the fence beside the road – presumably it was cold and windy up on the wires. As we pulled up in another gateway, it started to rain properly now so we didn't stop. We tried to scan the bare fields down before the village but the rain was blowing in through the open window, so we decided to move on.



Spanish Sparrow & Pallid Swift – at Embalse de Alcollarin

We drove round to the Embalse de Alcollarin, hoping it might just be a shower and ease off again, but it was still raining when we arrived. On the way in, we couldn't see any Bee-eaters around their nest holes and no Lesser Kestrels around the dam. After all the rain over the winter, the reservoir was the fullest we had ever seen it. Just a couple of **Great Crested Grebes** and **Cormorants** were on the water at the dam end. No one particularly wanted to get out in the rain too, so we continued on and round the track beside the reservoir. All we could see round the edge were a few **Mallard** and **Gadwall** and several more **Great Crested Grebes**. It was still raining when we got to the picnic area at the far end but seemed to have eased off a little. We decided to get out and have a look from the small dam below and we could see brighter sky approaching from the south now. Despite the weather, the **Nightingales** were still singing in the bushes. A couple of **Purple Herons** flew up

from the grass beyond and on the small reservoir above the dam, there were several **Little Grebes** out on the water and two **White Storks** on their respective nests. A hundred or so **Sand Martins** were feeding low over the grass and bushes below the dam and a couple of **Red-rumped Swallows** with them. A family of young **Stonechats** were on the dam wall, being fed by the male flying up from the flowers below.

As the rain seemed to be stopping, we went up to the minibus to get the scopes and back on the dam we could see a small patch of blue sky now. Scanning the reservoir, we found a single **Coot** with the ducks on the near edge, a couple of **Egyptian Geese** and a pair of **Greylags** on the islands further back, and a small flock of **Teal** flying round. A single **Spoonbill** was right over on the far side and we picked up a very distant **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. A lone **Pallid Swift** flew up over the dam and over our heads and two **Hawfinches** flew low over the trees and across past us. A **Kingfisher** appeared on the bushes by a small pool below briefly, as did a **Zitting Cisticola**. A **Western Swamphen** appeared briefly at the back of the small reservoir. Then the rain picked up again and we retreated to the trees. It took some time to clear through fully, and a couple of times we had to seek shelter, but the sky got bluer and bluer to the south of us and eventually the sun came out.

Almost immediately, we could hear a **Woodlark** start to sing over the hillside behind. From out on the dam again, the **Marsh Harriers** started to fly round over the back of the small reservoir. We scanned the hillside beyond and very quickly more raptors started to circle up. First **Black Kites**, followed by a couple of **Short-toed Eagles** and distant **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** over towards the Villuercas mountains beyond. Things started to move. The hirundines quickly gained height and moved on, two **Little Ringed Plovers** flew in over the main reservoir and continued on up over the small dam and off and then we spotted two **Spoonbills** flying very high to the north, disappearing off towards the mountains.

We decided to go for a short walk along the track to see if we could see a **Woodlark** and we didn't have to go too far before one flew over. A **Common Cuckoo** was calling in the trees and eventually flew out past us, followed by a second. A couple of **Great Reed Warblers** were singing from down by the water now. Still scanning the sky for raptors, we found a couple of **Booted Eagles**, one pale phase and one dark phase. We hadn't thought we would be staying that long when we arrived in the rain, but it was time for lunch already so we walked back to the picnic area. A couple of **Woodchat Shrikes** were in the trees along with lots of Spanish Sparrows. As we were finishing lunch, two minibuses arrived with another large group, so we decided to move on. Just as we packed up, it started to spit with rain again and as we drove back to the road it started to come down heavily. We retreated to the café by a nearby filling station for coffee and thankfully this time it passed through fairly quickly. By the time we finished our coffee, we could see blue sky again to the south.



Bee-eater – at Santa Brava & **Iberian Yellow Wagtail** – in the ricefields

We drove back the way we had come earlier, round via Campo Lugar and over the steppe road, which was quiet now. At the far end, we found a **Little Owl** sunning itself on the rocks. Over the main road, we continued down to the Embalse de Santa Brava. A couple of **Common Sandpipers** flew round over the water but otherwise it looked typically fairly quiet. Stopping to photograph a couple of **Bee-eaters** on a fence just beyond, a Hobby flew past. Several **Lesser Kestrels** were flying around above the face of the dam.

Out into the ricefields beyond, we pulled up by a gate and got out and found a male **Northern Wheatear** on the bund in front. We could see some very distant **Gull-billed Terns** and three marsh terns with them. They eventually came a little closer and we could see they were three **Whiskered Terns** with eleven **Gull-billed Terns**. At one point, they flushed a flock of about ten small waders right over the back – they looked like **Curlew Sandpipers** but were just too far away to make out, particularly as there was a little heat haze now. Surprisingly, they were the only waders we saw here. Three **Greater Flamingoes** right over the back were a bit of a surprise to find here and when they were spooked by something and flew up, about a dozen **Spoonbills** and a small group of what looked to be **Black-headed Gulls** came up too. It was all very distant though. A **Montagu's Harrier** flew in and came straight towards us and when it turned we could see it was a 2nd calendar year male. As we walked back up to the minibus, a **Short-toed Eagle** drifted over. A couple of **Iberian Yellow Wagtails** had flown past calling and as we drove on, we found another pair by the edge of the road. The male posed nicely on the wires, allowing us a great view of its clean white throat. Another **Northern Wheatear**, this time a female, flew up from the side of the road and landed in the edge of one of the fields.

We carried on further, out of the ricefields and round to an open area with scattered trees where we have seen **Black-winged Kites** in recent years. There were several **Iberian Grey Shrikes** on the wires but no sign of any kites at first, as we tried to remember the exact spot where they were last year. We turned around and started to drive back and a **Black-winged Kite** flew out of the trees, over the road in front of us and out across the fields the other side. There was nowhere to park, so we turned around again and pulled off onto the side of the road. The Kite had obviously come back in behind us, because it flew out again now and flew off the same way. We watched it hunting, hovering over the back of the fields. While we waited for it to come back, a few **Griffon Vultures** circled up overhead and a single **Black Vulture** drifted over. A **Common Buzzard** was circling with another kettle of vultures and we spotted a **Peregrine** high above them.



2cy male **Montagu's Harrier** & **Black-winged Kite** – in the ricefields

There was no sign of the first **Black-winged Kite** coming back, but then we noticed something fly up out of one of the trees. Another **Black-winged Kite**, it had a go at a **Kestrel** which was flying past, then landed nearby. We could see movement still in the top of the tree it had come out of, and through the scopes we could see three fully grown juvenile **Black-winged Kites** perched in the top. What we assumed was the female was still perched in the top of the nearby tree, through the scope we had a great view of its staring red eyes. After a while, it became clear that what was presumably the male was not coming back in with food quickly, so we

decided to move on. We drove round into Madrigalejo and as we came over the bridge over the river Ruercas we could hear **Great Reed Warblers** singing below. We parked on the edge of the village and stopped first to admire some impressive **House Martin** nests built several deep above the windows of one of the houses opposite. Several **House Martins** were coming and going and more faces were looking out from some of the nests. We then walked back to the bridge. The **Great Reed Warblers** were still singing and one was perched up in the top of the reeds below. Great views. After a while it flew up into the tree behind and we noticed a second in another tree slightly further back. A **Common Waxbill** appeared in the top of the reeds below the trees and appeared to be collecting nest material.

There was one last stop we still wanted to make, so back in the minibus we drove north of town and turned into the ricefields. Surprisingly, there were no waders on any of the wet paddies here either. A small flock of **Red Avadavats** flew up from the ditch beside the track ahead of us and landed again a little further up. We had just stopped to look at them when we heard **Collared Pratincoles** calling and noticed two flying in towards us over the stubble fields. As we got out, we realised there were a few more, flying up and down hawking for insects over the fields further back. The two drifted off back to join them and we thought we might have to drive round there to get closer views, but several then flew in over the stubble fields towards us again. While we were watching the **Pratincoles**, an interesting **Iberian Wagtail** flew in and landed on the side of the road in front of us. It had more yellow bleeding up into the centre of its white throat than normal. It had the raspy call of Iberian and was probably just natural variation, but if it turned up in the UK it would certainly not be accepted as one!



Great Reed Warbler & Collared Pratincole – near Madrigalejo

After a while, they all seemed to disappear and when we heard **Pratincoles** calling again we looked up to see a large group circling up higher and higher into the sky. We counted at least 55 **Collared Pratincoles** now, quite a sight. Eventually some dropped back down and started feeding over the fields again and two flew in and landed on one of the bunds in front of us. We had a good look at them in the scopes and, as they were still settled, we got back in the minibus and drove closer until we were stopped on the track directly opposite them. It was time to be getting back now, so eventually we had to tear ourselves away.

When we got back to the hotel, we were pleased to find that the missing suitcase had been delivered, as scheduled. After a short break we met again to go through the day's list on the terrace. It was much cooler this evening though, so we hurried through and then retired inside for dinner.

SATURDAY 12TH APRIL – *Low cloud & showers am, thunderstorms early pm, brightened up later, max 21C*

It was spitting with rain again as we packed up the minibus but thankfully only briefly, although more rain was forecast for this afternoon. As we drove over towards the Sierra de Villuerkas the tops were completely

shrouded in low cloud. A couple of **Eurasian Jays** flew across the road ahead of us as we wound up the road through the trees. We were still only in the foothills when we stopped, just below the cloud base, and although it was very grey it was still dry. A couple of **Red-rumped Swallows** were circling round over the swollen stream opposite and landed in a nearby bare tree. There were several **Common Cuckoos** calling and we got the scopes on two which were in the tops behind. A **Mistle Thrush** was perched up too and a couple of Greenfinches flew over. Three **Bee-eaters** flew in low and briefly landed in the tree right next to where we had parked.

We walked over the cattle grid and down the track through the deciduous oak dehesa. There were more **Cuckoos** in the trees and several **Woodchat Shrikes**, plus **Blue** and **Great Tits** and a few **Chaffinches**. Several **Nightingales** were singing in the brambles by the stream and we had glimpses of a couple as they flew round, chasing each other. There are normally **Hawfinches** in the trees here, but very few this year – just one was seen flying away by one of the group. This can be a good area for **Rock Sparrow** too but all we found at first were several **House Sparrows** nearer the road. Further in, we heard a **Short-toed Treecreeper** singing ahead of us and as we walked on to look for it a **Rock Sparrow** flew up from the ground under the trees. It landed on the lowest branch above but unfortunately didn't stay long. Before we could get the scope on it, it flew off back and disappeared through the trees as a second one came up too and followed it away.

The **Short-toed Treecreeper** was still singing so we walked on and eventually located it as it flew between the trees. We had some nice views of it feeding in a bare oak by the track before it moved back further in. While we were watching it, we heard a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** drumming in the distance. Scanning the trees in the direction of the sound, we managed to locate it on a dead branch much higher up on the hillside. Through the scopes, we could make out its laddered back and red crown, which meant it was a male. We watched it for a while, then turned round to head back. The **Short-toed Treecreeper** was still singing and the Woodpecker still drumming. Back at the minibus, we were just packing up when a **Wryneck** called in the trees nearby. As we stopped to listen and see if we could find it, it flew out over our heads and disappeared off down the road. It turned back into the trees behind a couple of holm oaks further down so we walked along the road to see if we could relocate it. Unfortunately it had gone quiet and there was no further sign of it. We did find three **Nightingales** chasing through the bushes and we watched them up in the bare branches of an oak tree above.



Red-rumped Swallow & Short-toed Treecreeper – in the dehesa

With the low cloud, there was no point heading up higher into the Villuercas today, so we had planned to drive further south and over to Alange. It took about an hour to get there and although the weather brightened up considerably, we also drove through several brief showers. When we arrived at the dam it was dry and bright. Lots of **Crag Martins** were chasing round over the rocks above with two or three **Alpine Swifts** with them. We quickly found a male **Rock Bunting** on a crag right up towards the top which we got in the scope. A **Blue Rock Thrush** appeared up there too and started singing and songflighting between the rocks. A few **Griffon Vultures**

flew in and landed on the rock face above us. We walked across the road from the car park to the top of the dam. More **Alpine Swifts** were here and really close, flying in and out of the dam face right below us. We watched them for a while, screaming round in small groups of two or three, out over the trees and river below, then back in again. It was all action for a while, then suddenly they all disappeared. There were several **Marsh Harriers** flying around over the reeds in the river below and then we spotted a **Purple Heron** on its nest. It was stood up at first and we were looking down so we could even see the blue eggs before it sat down again to incubate. Three **Common Waxbills** were in the reeds too. Five **Cattle Egrets** flew in towards us and up over the dam. On the reservoir behind, we could see a few **Mallard** and **Gadwall** and several **Great Crested Grebes**.

There was no sign of the **Alpine Swifts** coming back in so we decided to walk back to the minibus for lunch. There is a nice place to sit down overlooking the reservoir but as we got back to the car park we could see some very dark clouds approaching and it quickly started to rain. The **Blue Rock Thrush** was still singing on the crags above but flew across under an overhang where it was protected from the weather – it had clearly done this before! We retreated to the minibus to eat instead. It rained very heavily for a while but thankfully not long after we finished lunch it eased off again. It was still spitting, but we got out and watched the **Crag Martins** chasing round. The **Rock Bunting** appeared again and then dropped lower down the rocks. We thought it might have come right down but we couldn't find it.

When it finally brightened up, we went for a walk along the path round above the reservoir. A pair of **Egyptian Geese** were out on some rocks in the water, along with a rather dodgy looking grey and white **Greylag**, presumably of domestic origin. On the end of the rocks were three **Black-headed Gulls** and a **Little Ringed Plover**. A couple of **Gull-billed Terns** were flying round out over the water. Further on, we stopped to watch a couple of **Thekla's Larks** on the rocks below us and then another pair appeared on the slope just above the path and one flew up into the tree right above our heads. A **Sardinian Warbler** was singing in the bushes and we could hear at least a couple of **Common Quail** calling down by the edge of the reservoir. We seemed to be stood directly above one, but there was still no way we could see it in the grass.

The last bird we wanted to try to see here was **Black Wheatear**, but scanning the rocks up above as we walked on round, all we could see were more **Blue Rock Thrushes**. It started to spit with rain again, which seemed to have come in behind us, and most of the group decided to head back to the minibus. The rain didn't amount to anything and quickly stopped and only about a hundred metres further round we found a **Black Wheatear**. It was perched on the rocks just above the path, great views in the scopes, and we were stood right below it when it eventually started feeding again and gradually worked its way higher up. Mission accomplished, we headed quickly back to the bus to join the others, before it started to rain again.



Alpine Swift & Black Wheatear – at Alange

We were heading over to Mérida for the remainder of the afternoon, but the skies looked ominously dark over in that direction. We stopped for a comfort break at a nearby filling station and the heavens opened. For several minutes the rain was torrential and after handing back the keys for the loos we had to wait under cover for it to ease off a little before we could even get back to the minibus. It was still raining hard all the way to Merida but when we arrived it seemed to be brightening up behind us and almost immediately the rain stopped. Perfect timing!

As we walked round the edge of the park, a **Long-tailed Tit** was in some pines by the road. The Spanish race *irbii* is noticeably darker faced than northern races. We heard a **Blackcap** singing but there was no sound of any Golden Orioles – perhaps they haven't arrived yet. Maybe it was just the weather too, but the sun had come out by the time we got to the Roman bridge over the river Guadiana. We walked out to the middle of the bridge and scanned the islands below. A **Western Swamphen** was standing on the edge of one nearby, preening. Unusually, it was right out in the open so we got the scopes on it. A lovely view of it apart from the rubbish around it. We could see the heronry on the big island further downstream so we turned the scopes on that next. There were lots of **Cattle Egrets** and several **Spoonbills** on their nests in the trees and we quickly found a few **Black-crowned Night Herons** in the branches too. There were good numbers of **Glossy Ibis**, some still in the nest but some large creches of still only half grown juveniles were gathered down below, on the edge of the water. Plus a few **Grey Herons** but only a single **Little Egret** was visible. A succession of birds flew in and out, herons and **Cormorants**. Little groups and singles of **Glossy Ibis** and **Cattle Egret** flew past us over the bridge. There are normally Pallid Swifts here, nesting under the bridge. Again, perhaps we were still too early or like at the dam earlier they had disappeared off to feed. Just a single **Alpine Swift** flew over us a couple of times.



Western Swamphen & Glossy Ibis – from the Roman bridge at Mérida

We walked on to the far end of the bridge to scan the trees over towards the bank. There were a couple more **Blackcaps** in here and **Nightingales** singing. We were just wondering whether we might have to walk down and along the path on the bank to see if we could find a **Penduline Tit** when one flew out of the trees. We thought it might land again but it flew straight past us, over the bridge and off into the trees on the bank the other side. While it was sunny now, it was still looking very grey off to the south again and we could hear thunder rumbling again. We thought about following to see if we could find the **Penduline Tit** again but it didn't seem worth the risk of getting wet. We stood for a while enjoying the view from the bridge in the sunshine – an amazing place and so much wildlife all in the middle of a bustling city. Then we walked back to the minibus while it was still dry.

The drive back along the motorway was fairly uneventful, apart from a large flock of **Cattle Egrets** which came up from the field next door and circled round low over the carriageway ahead of us at one point. Cutting across on the small rural roads back towards Madronera, there were more birds, **Corn Buntings** and larks,

Woodchat and **Iberian Grey Shrikes**. The request was to try to get some photos of **Iberian Magpie** but they were not co-operating. It is a very good area for them and we saw lots, but most just flew across the road ahead of us and didn't stop, and others flew off as soon as we tried to pull up. It was cool this evening, and still damp out on the terrace, so we retreated inside to do the list tonight, before dinner. Saturday night and the hotel restaurant was just getting very busy, as we retired for the night.

SUNDAY 13TH APRIL – *Low cloud early am, lifted to bright sunshine, max 22C*

It was forecast to be the best weather of the week today, so we had planned to head up to Monfragüe National Park. When we woke up it was still very grey and cloudy and as we drove round Trujillo it was rather misty. As we approached the Rio Almonte, we drove into thick fog but it was actually low cloud and we dropped below it down into the river valley. We stopped by the bridge and got out for a quick look. A couple of **Red-rumped Swallows** were flying round with the **House Martins** and landed a couple of times by the puddle on the track ahead of us. As usual, there were lots of **Corn Buntings** and several **Spanish Sparrows** in the bushes and a **Common Cuckoo** was calling in the distance.

We walked down to the river, which was higher than normal after all the recent rains. A **Little Ringed Plover** flew round looking for somewhere to land, a **White Wagtail** flew over the water and landed in a tree on the far bank and one of the group had a brief **Grey Wagtail**. A pair of **Cirl Buntings** flew up from the bushes further down the track to our right but went straight off over the river and disappeared into the trees the other side before anyone else could get onto them. The high water had flooded the bottom of the stream so we couldn't get down along the track down beside the river to try to find them. We decided to head on to Monfragüe. Walking back up to the minibus, we stopped to look at a **Spanish Sparrow** collecting nest material below the road which stood out because it was not as heavily marked with black on its underparts. On closer inspection, we could see a dusting of grey through the middle of its chestnut crown too, a **Spanish Sparrow x House Sparrow hybrid**.

The ridge was still shrouded in low cloud as we drove on towards it and we couldn't see the castle on top until we were almost below it, when it appeared in a small break in the clouds. Only a couple of vultures seemed to be flying, so it didn't seem worth going up there this morning. We continued on to the Salto del Gitano viewpoint and were slightly surprised to find the car park almost full, despite the weather. At least we were below the cloud here and it seemed to be brightening up. We managed to find a parking space and got out. The rock face opposite was covered in **Griffon Vultures**, sat around waiting for it to warm up and there were more on the crags our side of the river too. Some were very low and one flew across and landed on a rock right below us. An **Egyptian Vulture** flew across in front of the cliff opposite and landed where we could get it in the scopes. We could see a **Black Stork** on its nest in the rocks, lower down towards the water below.



Griffon Vulture & Black Storks – on the rocks

Walking a little further up, we found a male **Blue Rock Thrush** on one of its favourite rocks. When it flew down, it was replaced by a male **Rock Bunting**. We had great views of both over the next hour or so we were here. The male **Blue Rock Thrush** flew round between the rocks singing and kept returning to the same perch where at one point it was joined by a female. The **Rock Bunting** did the same, at one point perching close to us on the edge of the crag above. There were several **Black Redstarts** too, including a stunning male right below us, plus **Wrens**, **Linnets** and **Serins** in the trees. **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Crag Martins** swooped around in front of us.



Blue Rock Thrush & Rock Bunting – at Salto del Gitano

As the sun started to break through the clouds and it started to warm up, the **Griffon Vultures** all started to take off from the cliffs and circle up. After a while, there was a huge kettle of vultures over the top of the Peña Falcon rock opposite, perhaps two or three hundred birds. We picked out a single **Black Vulture** in with the **Griffons** now and a **Short-toed Eagle** drifted through just behind them. Once they gained a bit of height, most of the **Griffons** seemed to drift off away from us along the ridge but the **Black Vulture** came across the river and straight over our heads. Another **Black Stork** flew in and landed on the nest next to its mate, which stood up so we could see they had two eggs. They stood together preening in the sunshine, looking more glossy green than black now in the sunshine.

A **Western Subalpine Warbler** flew across the road a little further up and disappeared into the brambles on the other side. When we had got everyone up from the viewpoint, it flew in to exactly the same spot and out again, disappearing off across the road. It clearly had a nest in there but it was gone for a while. We waited and when it reappeared we could see there was a pair nest building. The nest was just visible through the leaves and the two **Western Subalpine Warblers** kept coming back in with grass and weaving it into the nest. In the sunshine, finally a few butterflies appeared. A very worn **Nettle-tree Butterfly** was basking in the trees below us, as was a **Large Tortoiseshell**, one of the group had a brief **False Ilex Hairstreak** in the holm oaks and a **Speckled Wood** was sunning itself on the rocks behind us.

Finally, we had to tear ourselves away to go to find some facilities, so we drove on to the village at Villareal. Another pair of **Black Redstarts** were flicking in and out of the trees by the toilet block. It was already after midday, so we made use of the picnic tables here for lunch now, a delicious omelette sandwich and chickpea salad from the hotel. After lunch, we drove a little further up and got out for a walk. At the back of the parking area, a **Corn Bunting** was singing, there were several **Stonechats** in the bushes nearby and another **Western Subalpine Warbler**. A little further down, a **Thekla's Lark** was singing from a rock in amongst the Broom. We heard what sounded like a **Western Orphean Warbler** sub-singing behind us and walked back up to find it in the top of a small tree.

There were more butterflies down here, most notably about a dozen **Spanish Festoons**. The first refused to land despite following it for a couple of minutes, making the most of the warm weather to search for a mate, but we eventually had one settle where we could get a proper look at it. Several of the blues refused to stop too, but we managed to get good looks at **Black-eyed Blue**, **Common Blue** and **Brown Argus**. Down in the trees in the bottom, a couple of **Nettle-tree Butterflies** and another **Large Tortoiseshell** flew past and we found a **Cleopatra** flying round over the hillside above. A **Forester moth** was resting on some lavender. This can be a good place for migrant birds, but there was nothing different in here today. A couple of **Nightingales** were singing in the bushes and showed themselves briefly and a **Red-legged Partridge** was on the track. We decided to turn around and head back. There were a few **Griffon Vultures** circling over the ridge and a **Short-toed Eagle** drifted over too. A **Woodchat Shrike** was on the wires and another on the top of a dead tree the other side.



Western Orphean Warbler & Spanish Festoon butterfly – in Monfragüe

As we drove on through the park, we kept scanning the Cistus-covered hillsides hoping to find a **Western Black-eared Wheatear**. We were in luck as one flew across the road ahead of us and even better there was a pull-in where we could stop just a little further on. Looking back, we could see it perched on a rock above the road, a smart black-throated male, and got it in the scopes. We continued on and stopped again at Portilla del Tietar. There were three or four **Griffon Vultures** up when we arrived but when they drifted off there didn't seem to be much activity. We could only see a few **Griffon Vultures** on their nests on the rocks opposite, they seem to be a little late this year. A single **Black Vulture** circled high over the edge of the river upstream. Normally we would stay until the Spanish Imperial Eagles appeared, but having seen them so well the other day we didn't really need to. With the forecast for the next couple of days not being so good, we decided to move on and try to make the most of the sunshine this afternoon.

We would normally pop in to try for Spectacled Warbler on our way to the airport on the last morning, but Tuesday was forecast to be cold and very windy. So we decided to make our way back round that way to have a quick look now. Mid-afternoon is never an ideal time to look for warblers but needs must. We parked at the end of the track and walked back listening. There were several **Stonechats**, **Crested Larks** and the ever-present **Corn Buntings** out on the heath. Lots of **Painted Lady** butterflies were flying round and **Isturgia famula** moths in the lavender. We found a few **Dartford Warblers** which flew up out of the bushes and one perched on the top of some dead branches for a minute or so, if rather distantly. A **Sardinian Warbler** showed a little better, but we couldn't find any sign of a Spectacled Warbler where we had found them the last couple of years. We turned and walked slowly back, where a **Red-striped Oil Beetle** was running across the track now, but the bushes were still quiet. If the forecast turns out to be wrong, we figured we might have another go on Tuesday, as originally planned.

On our way back, we decided to call in briefly at the bullring in Trujillo. We had seen lots of **Lesser Kestrels** already, but not in good light where we could get photographs of them. This seemed like it might be our best opportunity. When we arrived, three were circling round low over the car park. They chased round, down into the bullring and back up again, before gaining height slowly and drifting off. There were other birds coming and going. A male landed on the ridge tiles briefly, a female dropped down and went straight in through one of the rounded open tiles and another male came stooping down with food in its bill before disappearing behind the roof. Some were circling high in the sky above and others were hovering over the open ground beyond. There were several **Spotless Starlings** singing on the roof too. When it went quiet, everyone climbed back into the minibus so it was time to head back. We could go through the list out on the terrace again this evening, with the **Bee-eaters** and **Swifts** calling overhead, before heading inside for dinner.

MONDAY 14TH APRIL – *Cloudy am, sunny pm, fresh breeze, max 17C*

The forecasts for today were decidedly mixed and it dawned cool with low cloud again. We were heading for the plains of La Serena and, as we dropped down out of the hills we got well below the cloud base but it became clear that the wind was already rather blustery. There were the usual birds on the way down – **Iberian Magpies** flying off from the side of the road, **Crested Larks** on the verges, **Bee-eaters** on the wires and one or two **Hoopoes** flying off. As we got down towards Campanario, a lone **Great Bustard** was standing out on the grass between the rocks as we passed, but we couldn't stop on the main road. Hopefully we would see some more later. The minor road across from Campanario was rather quiet today, apart from the usual **Corn Buntings** and a few **Thekla's Larks**. The river was swollen by all the recent rains and there was just a single pair of **Egyptian Geese** below the bridge.

Our main target for this morning was **Little Bustard**, so once we got to the plains we headed straight over to an area which is good for them. We pulled off the road and got out. A **Little Owl** was on the rocks behind us and a couple of **Hoopoes** flew off over the field. As we had seen elsewhere, the grass here was very high after all the rain over the winter. Coupled with the cool and windy weather, it felt like we might struggle today. So it was a bit of a surprise when one of the group found a male **Little Bustard**. It was rather distant, two fields away, but had just walked out of some tall thistles and was now standing right out in the open on some short grass. Through the scopes, we could make out that it was displaying, throwing its head back, but it was too far away to hear it. After a while, it turned and walked back into the thistles.



Lesser Kestrel – at Trujillo & **Little Bustard** – at La Serena

Moving on, we took a track out into the middle of the plains. We hadn't gone far when we spotted another male **Little Bustard** out in a field, much closer this time. We piled out and quickly got the scopes on it, getting a really good view of its puffed out black and white-striped neck. This one was displaying too and now we could hear it calling as well. It gradually worked its way closer, stopping and calling all the time, then suddenly

started to move more quickly with its head down. It chased a female up out of the grass but she seemed to be completely disinterested in his efforts. He turned round and started to walk back again and she sat back down in the grass. The male **Little Bustard** was a bit closer to the track now, further along, so as we drove on we stopped again. But as we pulled up, it put its head down despite still being a fair distance away.

Continuing on down the track, there was no sign of any **Montagu's Harriers** in the field where we saw them last year but over the next ridge we could see a couple flying round over a barley crop. We stopped to watch and realised there were more – in the end, we counted at least seven together. The two adult males were displaying from time to time, twisting, turning and tumbling above the crop from time to time. There was a young, second calendar male here too and it seemed to attract the ire of the older males which repeatedly chased after it when it got too close. The females were flying round low over the crop and occasionally birds were landing in it. It was great to watch all the **Montagu's Harriers**, but after a while they seemed to drift off to feed, so we carried on a little further.

The grass and crops in the fields beyond was all too high. We had hoped to find a bare field, but there wasn't one here this year, so we turned to come back. The **Montagu's Harriers** were back over the same field, so we couldn't not stop for a few minutes and watch them again, particularly as this time the other side of the bus got to see the best of the spectacle. Eventually, we had to tear ourselves away. Further on, the **Little Bustard** was still displaying where we had seen it earlier, but a bit further back now. The sun was starting to come out, so there was a bit of heat haze too now.



Montagu's Harrier & Great Bustard – at La Serena

Back out on the main road, we made our way round to the minor road straight across the middle of the plains. It was a surprise to find two **Little Ringed Plovers** in the middle of the tarmac ahead of us at one point, given there didn't seem to be any water anywhere close. Driving slowly down, scanning the fields, we spotted some **Great Bustards** in the grass quite close to the road. It was hard to find anywhere we could all see them over the tall vegetation on the verge, so we pulled up and got out. They were remarkably settled and we counted nine of them now, a drove of males of different ages, a smart mature one led them as they walked up the slope and a particularly smart older male with impressive whiskers brought up the rear. Eventually, they disappeared behind some rocks and we quickly got back in the minibus before any traffic came.

We pulled off the road at the start of a track to scan a field opposite which had been cultivated but was now grassing over again, but couldn't see anything. A **Great Bustard** flew across in the distance the other way. It was lunchtime, so we continued down the track and found somewhere to park. As we ate our breaded chicken sandwiches and delicious Spanish salads, we were serenaded by several **Calandra Larks** fluttering up overhead. It was wonderful to listen to the mimicry – as well as the usual Green Sandpiper, one did a particularly good impression of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and another gave a great burst of Goldfinch, woven seamlessly into the

constant rush of different notes. The flowers in some of the fields are also good this year, and the one behind was a riot of colour – mainly yellow hawkbit, but with blue and purple speedwell and white daisies too.

After lunch, we continued on up the track down across the valley below and up to the farm buildings on top of the hill beyond. As we pulled up to scan the paddocks in front, a **Little Owl** was on the rocks right next to the fence and gave us a typically angry stare before it flew off pursued by a small flock of sparrows and disappeared into a larger pile of rocks the other side of the track. Several **Short-toed Larks** were feeding in the short-cropped grass in the paddocks and six of them came out onto the track to dustbath with some sparrows. There was a distant lack of passerine migrants everywhere this year, presumably due to the weather, but we did find a single female **Northern Wheatear** now in the paddocks too.

We turned and drove back to the main road and across to the track the other side. Two **Collared Pratincoles** were hawking round over the cultivated field we had scanned earlier and one landed briefly, before they both drifted off. We were hoping to find some sandgrouse up along here but there was no sign of any. It was early afternoon now, so far from an ideal time to look. There were several more **Short-toed Larks** which flew up from the track ahead of us, but otherwise it seemed rather quiet so we didn't go too far before we found somewhere to turn round and headed back to the road.

The weather was forecast to deteriorate this afternoon but it was beautifully sunny now and we wanted to make the most of it. We drove down to the far end of the plains and stopped to fill up the minibus in Cabeza del Buey, then continued on up into the hills to Benquerencia de la Serena. Through the narrow streets, the parking area was surprisingly full (with locals, not visitors) but thankfully we found a large enough space to park the minibus. Then we took the steps up the hill between the houses and followed the path behind up towards the old Castillo. Several **Crag Martins** and **Red-rumped Swallows** were hawking up and down in front of the rocks and, when we got to the castle, we found at least four **Black Wheatears** up on the crags above us. They disappeared over the top, but further up we found one on the remains of a brick wall below us which stayed for a minute or two so we could get a good look at it.



Alpine Swift & Egyptian Vulture – at Benquerencia

It was rather windy up on the castle on the top of the ridge, but there is the most fantastic view out over the plains the other side. Worth the climb up for that alone, but there were birds too. Four or five **Alpine Swifts** were shooting back and forth mostly below us along the line of the ridge but pulling fast turns and acrobatics in the wind right in front of us. A couple of **Griffon Vultures** drifted along below us and then an **Egyptian Vulture** appeared. It seemed to be just enjoying the wind, circling up and down along the ridge giving us great views right in front of us. It was carrying what seemed to be a particularly unappetising piece of dry carrion in its bill. Then a **Black Stork** appeared too, circling in front of the rocks and it too spent some time drifting up and down in the wind. We heard the **Red-billed Choughs** calling and they seemed to come down below the

ridge behind us. Thankfully, they reappeared after a while on the other side and we watched them flying round, tumbling. A few of them landed on the rocks where we could watch them feeding through the scopes.

Again, we could have stayed here all day, but we decided to move on and make a final stop on our way back. The weather had been kind to us today, but as we drove back north it started to cloud over. It was very grey and threatening when we arrived at Vegas Altas and took the minor road out through the ricefields. The first ones were rather dry but further in we found some wetter paddies. We stopped to scan one which looked promising but was completely devoid of birds – it seems like wader passage is still to get underway in earnest. While we were scanning, we caught a glimpse of what appeared to be several **Little Gulls** flying over much further on, so we continued round to see if we could find them. There was a nice complex of wet paddies here so we stopped to look again. There were at least a couple of hundred **Black-headed Gulls** but they were mostly feeding out of sight and flying up occasionally and we had only a brief glimpse of a **Little Gull** with them before it disappeared again. Four **Gull-billed Terns** flew up and down past us calling and four **Collared Pratincoles** were hawking up and down further back, over the fields where most of the gulls were.

We had been surprised not to find even any **Black-winged Stilts** in the wet ricefields elsewhere but here there were seventeen in one paddy. Other waders were still thin on the ground though, and all we could see were five **Common Sandpipers** together on another wet field. There were a couple of **Spoonbills**, one or two **Grey Herons** and several **Little Egrets**. A flock of **Red Avadavats** flew up from the side of ditch and off. The only way to get down to where the gulls were feeding seemed to be to walk a long way down a muddy track, so we drove on. From the top of the ridge beyond, we looked to see if there was any other way but it didn't look like it and we had to be getting back now. As we drove back north, there were a couple of **Rollers** on the wires by the road and then it started to rain. It was pretty heavy for a while but had eased off a little by the time we got back to the hotel and thankfully we didn't get too wet while we emptied the minibus and got inside. Even though the rain then stopped, it was still cold and damp so we met in the bar for a drink then retired to the dining room where it was quieter to run through the day's list before dinner.

TUESDAY 15TH APRIL – *Cloudy am with heavy showers, sunny pm, cool breeze, max 14C*

Unfortunately our time in Extremadura was almost up, and we would be making our way back to the airport in Madrid today. We had a little time for birding first, although the forecast was for it to be cold, cloudy and windy. It was certainly grey and cloudy when we met outside at the minibus with all our cases after breakfast. One of the birds we hadn't run into yet this week was **Stone Curlew**, possibly not helped by the height of the vegetation this year. So after packing everything in and checking out of the hotel, we drove round to Belen.



Woodchat Shrike & Stone Curlew – at Belen

Some **Stone Curlews** roost in an area of rocks here but when we arrived there were cows walking around all through the bushes and we couldn't immediately see any. It was cool and breezy though. Scanning all around, the grass in the surrounding fields looked very high here too and it was very damp after the rain last night. A **Little Owl** was perched on the fence by a barn at the bottom of the hill, a couple of **Thekla's Larks** flew around the rocks and a **Woodchat Shrike** landed on the fence right in front of us, and a **Red-rumped Swallow** was flying round low over the grass. A **Stone Curlew** started calling and one of the group, who was a little further down the road, saw it flying around over the bottom of the field. Unfortunately it was lost to view so we walked down to see if we could relocate it. There were a couple of **Sardinian Warblers** in the brambles at the bottom and the usual **Stonechats** and **Corn Buntings**, but there was nowhere that looked really suitable for it down here and no further sign of the **Stone Curlew**. The road was surprisingly busy with traffic and just as a large lorry drove past the **Stone Curlew** called again. It sounded as if it was some way off, but we couldn't tell where. We walked back up to the top of the hill and all the group climbed straight into the minibus ready to go. All hope was not yet lost though and we went back to scanning from the gate. Perseverance duly paid off, when we found a single **Stone Curlew** out on the grass between the bushes on the rocks. We got it in the scope and the group had to pile out of the minibus again. Mission accomplished!

Finding the **Stone Curlew** this morning had taken a little longer than planned. We had hoped to drive out beyond Santa Marta to have a quick look for Cirl Bunting next but we were short on time now and, as we made our way back through the village, we could see very dark clouds ahead. Then it started to rain. Change of plan, and we decided to head straight over to Arrocampo and spend some more time at the reserve there on our way to the airport. It was the right call and as we got through the tunnel at Casas de Miravete it was much brighter and dry the other side of the sierra. We stopped first by hide 4 and walked back to scan the reeds. This is often a good place for Savi's Warbler but all we could hear this morning were **Reed Warbler**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Nightingales** in the bushes. Several **Cattle Egrets**, **Great White Egret**, **Grey Heron** and a **Spoonbill** flew up out of the pool in the reeds at the back. Across the road, we walked down through the bushes to look at the main reservoir. Three **Moorhens** and another **Great White Egret** were in the reeds opposite and a **Purple Heron** flew out. Several **Cormorants** were nesting on a pylon in the middle of the reservoir and we could see a couple of distant **Gull-billed Terns**. We just heard a couple of snatches of **Sedge Warbler** singing and managed to find a couple of them chasing round through the bottom of the reeds across the water. A **Great Reed Warbler** sang briefly too.



Western Swamphen & Ferruginous Duck – at Arrocampo

Back in the minibus, we drove on to the visitor centre on the edge of Saucedilla. There were quite a few people here today, particularly down by hide 1, several with long lenses photographing a **Little Egret** feeding on the edge of the water. As we walked round there, we spotted a **Western Swamphen** through a gap in the reeds before it crept deeper in out of view. Standing by hide 1, one or two **Purple Herons** flew up from time to time. A **Griffon Vulture** and a couple of **Black Kites** drifted over. A pair of **Ferruginous Ducks** flew in from the

reservoir behind but dropped straight down into a pool in the reeds out of view, a nice bonus as this is a species we don't normally see here. We could hear a **Reed Warbler** singing and then caught a snatch of **Savi's Warbler** reeling briefly. It reeled again and then a second **Savi's Warbler** reeled a little closer, the other side of the channel. Then they both went quiet.

We were just about to head back for lunch when another single **Ferruginous Duck** flew in and circled round in front of us. It disappeared behind the trees but it seemed to be dropping towards the pool by the track further on. We had a quick walk round there to see if we could find it, but it had obviously landed somewhere else or flown on. There was some reward for our effort though as a male **Little Bittern** flew up and away across the water before landing in the reeds beyond. The hotel had provided packed lunches so we had an early lunch on the picnic tables behind the visitor centre. Then we climbed back on the minibus for the last time and set off to Madrid and the airport.

The drive took a couple of hours and was uneventful. Most of the group took advantage to have a doze. At the airport, we dropped off the minibus and checked in before making our way through security and immigration to the gate. Our flight to London Heathrow took off and landed pretty much on time, Terminal 5 was not too busy and our bags appeared at the carousel pretty quickly. Even better, they all arrived this time! The weather was rather like Spain here now – damp and chilly – but after the lovely empty roads we had just enjoyed we headed out to typical gridlock on the M25.



Pond Turtles – at Santa Marta & **Red-striped Oil Beetle** – at Jaraicejo

Oriole Birding Extremadura Land of the Conquistadors 2025									
<i>Species order, names and taxonomy follows - Clements, J. F., T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, D. Roberson, T. A. Fredericks, B. L. Sullivan, and C. L. Wood. 2018. The eBird/Clements checklist of birds of the world: v2018. Downloaded from http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/</i>									
#	Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)									
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			✓				
2	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓						
4	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓
5	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓				
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>							✓
Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)									
8	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>		h	h	h			h
9	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Podicipedidae (Grebes)									
10	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		h	✓				
11	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	✓			
Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)									
12	Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pteroclididae and Otidae (Sandgrouse and Bustards)									
15	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>		✓					
16	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		✓					
17	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		✓	✓			✓	
18	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>		✓				✓	
Cuculidae (Cuckoos)									
19	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	h	
20	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>	✓	✓					
Apodidae (Swifts)									
20	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>			✓		✓		
Rallidae (Rails and Coots)									
23	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>							h
24	Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
25	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓				
26	Western Swampen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓
Burhinidae (Thick-knees)									
27	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>							✓
Recurvirostridae and Charadriidae (Stilts, Avocets, Plovers and allies)									
28	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓					✓	
29	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)									
30	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓		✓			✓	
31	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓						
32	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓						

#	Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Glareolidae (Pratincoles)									
33	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>			✓			✓	
Laridae (Gulls and Terns)									
34	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>						✓	
35	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓		✓	
36	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓				
37	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
38	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>			✓				
Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)									
39	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopus roseus</i>			✓				
Ciconiidae (Storks)									
40	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		✓			✓	✓	
41	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Phalacrocoracidae and Ardeidae (Cormorants, Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)									
42	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	✓						✓
44	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓
46	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓		✓				✓
47	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
48	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓			✓	✓		✓
49	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			✓				
50	Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				✓			
Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)									
51	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓			✓			
52	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)									
53	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓		✓				
54	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>					✓	✓	
55	Black (Cinereous) Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
56	Eurasian Griffon	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Short-toed Snake-Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		✓	✓		✓		
58	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
59	Spanish Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓					
60	Eurasian Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
61	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		✓	✓			✓	
62	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
63	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tytonidae and Strigidae (Owls)									
65	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓			✓	
Upupidae (Hoopoes)									
66	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	h
Alcedinidae, Meropidae and Coraciidae (Kingfishers, Bee-eaters and Rollers)									
67	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓	✓				
68	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>		✓	✓			✓	
Picidae (Woodpeckers)									
70	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>				✓			
71	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>				✓			

#	Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Falconidae (Falcons)									
72	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
73	Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓					
74	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			✓				
75	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓				
Laniidae (Shrikes)									
76	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oriolidae and Corvidae (Orioles, Crows, Jays, and Magpies)									
78	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				✓			
79	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>						✓	
82	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
83	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Alaudidae (Larks)									
84	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>		✓	✓			✓	
85	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓	✓			✓	
86	Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			✓				
87	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hirundinidae (Swallows)									
89	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
90	Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
91	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Common House-Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Paridae (Tits)									
94	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
95	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	h	✓	✓	✓	
96	Eurasian Penduline-Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				✓			
97	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓			
Sittidae and Certhiidae (Nuthatches and Treecreepers)									
98	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓			
Troglodytidae (Wrens)									
99	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					✓		
Scotocercidae (Bush Warblers and Allies)									
100	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓		h	h	h		h
Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)									
101	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>							h
102	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>							✓
103	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓						h
104	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	✓		✓			h	h
105	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
106	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>				✓			
107	Western Orphean Warbler	<i>Curruca hortensis</i>					✓		
108	Western Subalpine Warbler	<i>Curruca iberiae</i>					✓		
109	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	h	✓	✓	✓		✓
110	Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>					✓		

#	Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)									
111	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	h	h	h	✓	✓	h	h
112	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			✓	✓	✓		
113	Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓	✓		
114	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
115	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>				✓		✓	
116	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			✓			✓	
117	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>					✓		
Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)									
118	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓		
119	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Sturnidae (Starlings)									
120	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓						
121	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)									
122	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					✓		
123	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		✓	✓				
124	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
125	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓					
Fringillidae (Finches)									
126	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	h	✓	h	✓	✓		
127	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			✓	✓			
128	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	h	h		✓	✓	✓	
129	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>				✓	✓	✓	
130	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
131	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)									
132	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
133	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				✓	✓		
Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)									
134	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
135	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
136	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓			
137	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>			✓	✓			
138	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>			✓			✓	
#	Other Wildlife	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>							✓
2	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓					
3	Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>				✓			
4	Montpellier Snake	<i>Malpolon monspessulanus</i>		✓					
5	Spanish Pond Turtle	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓
6	European Pond Turtle	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>		✓					
7	Red-eared Slider	<i>Trachemys scripta</i>				✓			
8	Perez's Frog	<i>Pelophylax perezi</i>		h	h	h		h	
10	Spanish Festoon	<i>Zerynthia rumina</i>					✓		
10	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>					✓		
12	Small White	<i>Artogeia rapae</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	
13	Bath White	<i>Euchloe crameri</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	

#	Other Wildlife	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
15	Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>					✓		
16	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>					✓		
17	False Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium esculi</i>					✓		
18	Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>					✓		
19	Black-eyed Blue	<i>Glaucopteryx melanops</i>					✓		
20	Southern Brown Argus	<i>Aricia cramera</i>					✓		
21	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>					✓		
22	Nettle-tree Butterfly	<i>Libythea celtis</i>					✓		
23	Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>					✓		
24	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>					✓	✓	
25	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>					✓		
26	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓			✓		
28	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓			✓		
29	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>					✓		
30	Forester sp	<i>Adscita sp</i>					✓		
31	Moth sp	<i>Isturgia famula</i>					✓		
32	Diamond-back Moth	<i>Plutella xylostella</i>					✓		
33	Narrow-winged Grey	<i>Eudonia angustea</i>					✓		
34	Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>	✓						
35	Egyptian Grasshopper	<i>Anacridium aegyptium</i>	✓						
36	Red-striped Oil Beetle	<i>Berberomeloe majalis</i>					✓		
#	Sites visited		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	Embalse de Arrocampo		✓						✓
2	Santa Marta de Magasca			✓					
3	Llanos de Caceres			✓					
4	Campo Lugar				✓				
5	Emblase de Alcollarin				✓				
6	Madrigalejo				✓				
7	Garciaz					✓			
8	Embalse de Alange					✓			
9	Mérida					✓			
10	Rio Almonte						✓		
11	Monfragüe National Park						✓		
12	Jaraicejo						✓		
13	Trujillo						✓		
14	La Serena							✓	
15	Benquerencia de la Serena							✓	
16	Vegas Altas							✓	
17	Belen								✓