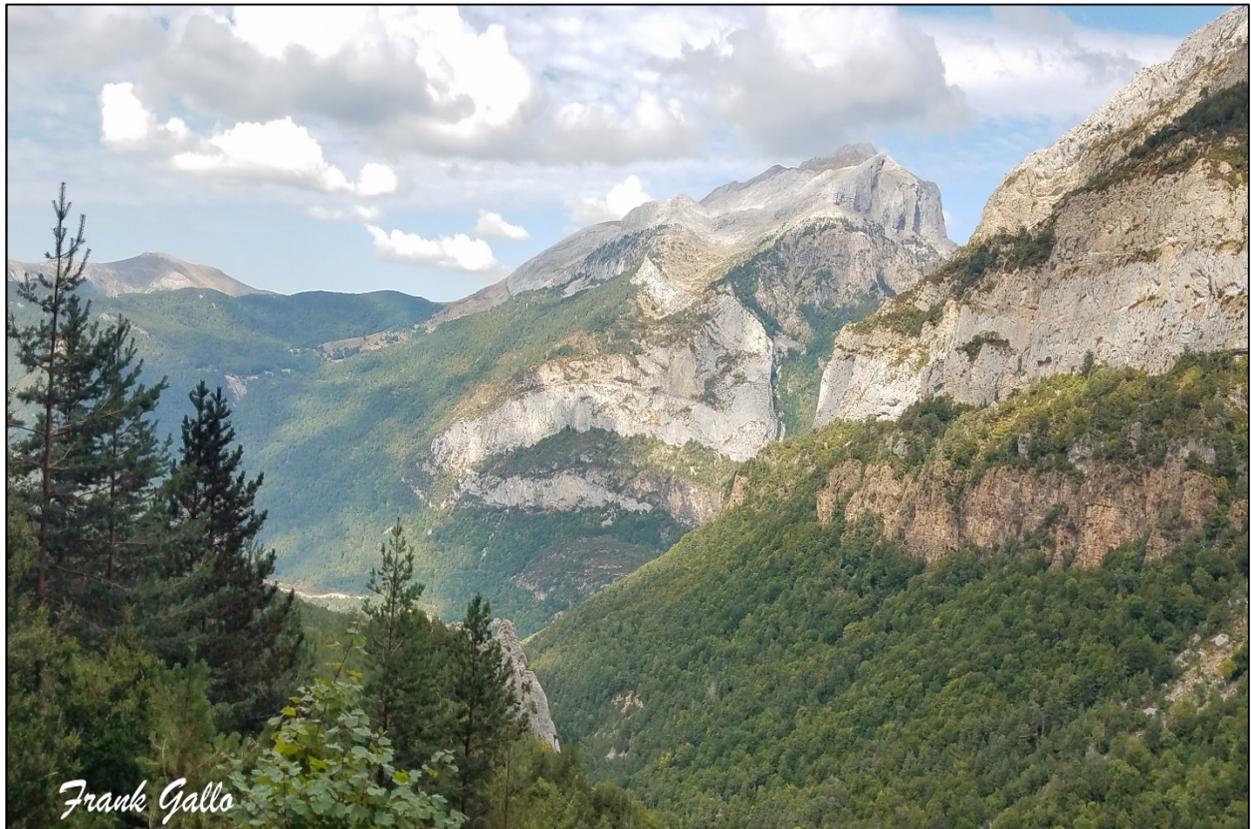




SPAIN: TRIP REPORT

Aug 31 – Sept 16, 2018

Report & Photos by Frank Gallo



Pre-Trip Day 1: September 1, 2018 - Seville to Andujar

The Arye Hotel in Seville, our starting off point, is ideally located beside the high-speed train station and rental car park. We met for breakfast at 7 a.m. Christian and I walked to the train station to get the rental van, and after a bit of wrangling with the rental folks, we were able to pick everybody up and leave by 9:30 a.m. on the A4 to Andujar. Before we left, there were at least 50 Pallid Swift calling and flying around above the hotel for everyone to enjoy. Along the way to Andujar, we saw a couple of Black Kites, Booted Eagles, Eurasian Kestrels, and 250 migrating White Storks circling over the fields. We arrived at the Andujar exit, gassed up the vans (there's no stations in the park) around 12 p.m., and drove an hour or so on windy roads into the National Park, to the town of Virgin de la Cabeza and our hotel Serisa, which sits just below the monastery. After checking in, we were served a wonderful sit-down welcome lunch with wine and two courses. After a little rest, we left at 4 p.m. to go birding.



We drove down to the Jándula River, stopping along the way on a dirt road, where we saw our first Azure-winged Magpies, a fairly large flock, totaling 54 birds, that was feeding in the grasses near the road but flew away from us through the trees. Nearby, there was a small flock of lovely Long-tailed Tits, along with a few Blue Tits and Great Tits, and our first nuthatch. A **Eurasian Jay** also perched briefly atop a tree before flying across the road.



We then drove a little farther down the road, parked, and walked down to the edge of the river, where we saw a number of songbirds including Chaffinch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Blue Tits, Great Tits, and another Eurasian Nuthatch. We were also fortunate to see two Spanish Imperial Eagles circling over the hill, and several Wood Pigeons.

We then drove to the Jándula River, where we worked along the river until dusk looking for birds and Iberian lynx. This is a good area for Lynx. We had nice looks at Yellow Wagtail along the river, a White Wagtail on a rock, and an amazing Common Kingfisher that was flying up and down the river near two large boulders. Our first Reed Warblers were seen across the river feeding low and moving through vines and root tangles at the water's edge. We also saw many Willow Warblers and a couple of **Cetti's Warblers**, with their reddish-brown backs, and dark grayish brown undersides. It was a rewarding first day.



Dinner was at the hotel.

Pre-Trip Day 2: September 2 - Parque Natural Sierra de Andujar: Santuario de la Virgin Cabeza with several stops along Jándula River.

Today we had breakfast at 7:30 a.m. to give everyone a chance to catch up on some sleep. After a nice continental breakfast, we spent time birding around the hotel until 8:30 a.m. A large flock of 43 azure-wing magpies, heard last night as they flew by, was feeding around the courtyard and across the street at first light. Collared Doves and European Bee-eaters were frequenting the phone wires across the street and were flying around the neighborhood on both mornings; we had nice looks at several of both species. Rock Sparrow is supposed to be in the area but none made their presence known. A large colony of House-Martins breeds across the street and come out just after dawn to fly around the neighborhood before dispersing. We also saw several Red-rumped Swallows flying up the valley above the river below us. This is a great area for raptors. Our hotel is just down the hill from the monastery **Santuario de la Virgin Cabeza**, which hosts the second largest spring pilgrimage in Spain. It is also perched atop the highest point in the area, about 4,200 feet.

We drove down the hill heading for the Jándula River and stopped at the bridge at the side road we birded last night. We were blessed with great looks at **Hawfinches** sitting in the treetops – they are nomadic, often difficult to find, and a rare treat!



We continued to an area with many overlooks that can be very good for finding Iberian lynx. Our ultimate goal was the dam at Jándula Reservoir where Black Vultures are often seen. We saw several there in the distance. On the way, we spotted a kettle of Honey Buzzards joined by a Black Kite all soaring over a pinnacle. We eventually stopped at an overlook where we met three Danes and their guide, all biologists, who were looking for mammals. They were quite nice, and pointed out an Osprey, then later at the dam, came back to tell us they'd found **ibex** at the base of the spillway; they are usually seen walking on the rocky hillsides around the valley.

While we were there, we also had nice looks at a young Spanish (Imperial) Eagle. We ate lunch at the dam, and we were joined by some feeding Hawfinch (maybe six or eight) flying in and out of wild olive trees and drinking and bathing in a puddle beside the base of the dam. Green Finch, European Goldfinch, and a European Jay were also feeding in the wild olives and berry vines below the dam.



On several occasions during the morning and early afternoon, we were treated to great views of red and fallow deer, rabbit, mouflon, and, of course, the Iberian ibex walking around and feeding on figs at the dam. Red-legged Partridge, Corn Buntings and Thekla Larks were also seen in fields along the way to the dam.

After lunch and birding around the dam, we drove to the ice cream shop El Rancho, where we had wonderful and much-needed, iced coffee and sorbet, as it was unusually hot. On the drive to the ice-cream shop, we went through olive groves, and past a test bullfighting ring, where we also saw retired fighting bulls put out to pasture. We stopped to view a young Spanish Imperial Eagle and later saw a Short-toed Eagle and a Common Buzzard sitting on powerline towers. Common Buzzard and a **Short-toed Eagle** were also seen on other towers earlier in the day.

After ice cream, we headed back to the Jándula River Bridge where we saw the Hawfinch in the morning. We arrived around 2:30 p.m. and spent the rest of the afternoon birding along the river. The area was pretty birdy. A few Cirl Buntings were feeding beside the road when we arrived, along with a couple of Garden Warblers feeding in the trees along the river. We watched both Azure-winged and Eurasian Magpies drinking from and bathing in the river. We enjoyed close views of Short-toed Treecreeper, many Long-tailed Tits, Blue and Great Tits, and Willow Warblers. We watched both a Yellow Wagtail and **Grey Wagtail** flitting around atop boulders in the water, and a beautiful Common Kingfisher that perched low beside the river. A highlight was a young male Goshawk that flew up river before circling over the hill. Walking to the cars, most of the group also saw a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers in a tree beside the road, and a female Golden Oriole that flew across the road. We left for the hotel at 6:15 p.m. and arrived around 6:30 p.m. We met for dinner and the list at 7:30 p.m. Tomorrow it was back to Seville to pick up Wink and Becky before heading south towards Tarifa.



Day 3 (Day 1 Main Tour): September 3: Mirador Astronomico Mingorrillos; Ecija; drive to Seville then south to Laguna Medina then Zahara

After breakfast we drove to Mingorrillos Mirador, an overlook in lynx country, where we stayed until about 9:15 a.m. While we were there, a large herd of mouflon, with at least four or five adult males sporting large curving horns and white flank patches, walked across a dirt road down the hill from us. Several large Red Deer were also visible from the Mirador. An Iberian Grey Shrike was seen from the Mirador sitting on the top of a tree, briefly, and a Thekla Lark sang from atop a rock outcrop, and provided us wonderful views. We had nice looks at a male

Dartford Warbler feeding together with a female Subalpine Warbler, and of a Redstart near the parking area, and of another (a male on a green post) as we were driving back down the road. I spotted a Spanish Imperial Eagle sitting on a tree top and Christian spied a Booted Eagle perched upon on another tree. The Booted Eagle was a fairly light-colored bird. Our first Tawny Pipit of the trip flew overhead, calling. We saw also several Eurasian Jays, Crested Tits and a Eurasian Nuthatch.



We then drove towards Andujar, and stopped for coffee at a rest area; it was just before our lunch stop at the River Jenil, in the town of Ceija. Along the river, there were several Cetti's Warblers singing, and at least one was seen by most of the group. We had nice looks at a **Short-toed Eagle** that flew right over us, and at several Isabelline (Western Olivaceous) Warblers, new for the trip, along the dirt track and river. We then drove back to the Ayre Hotel in Seville, about 45 minutes away and arrived about 2:35 p.m. to pick up Wink and Becky. The traffic near the hotel was horrendous, and it took us more than 30 minutes just to get through the roundabout. It took another half an hour to get back out after picking them up. It was comforting to note, however, that there were still Pallid Swifts over the hotel. We then drove South on the A4, passing a truck carrying **cork**, before veering off to Laguna de Medina. A rare Rüppell's Vulture was seen along the way circling with Griffon Vultures over the road. Photos were taken.



Lagoona Medina was hopping with birds, the most I've ever seen there, and we hit the rare duck trifecta! 11+ White-headed Ducks (my first in many years), 5 adult males, two young males with a dark line through the white face patch, and four females with lined faces, gave us fantastic views. We were also incredibly lucky to find 5 Marbled Teal, a rare and often difficult bird to find (a life bird for me) and at least 5 Ferruginous

Ducks, which I've only seen once before. At one point, there was a Marbled Teal preening next to 2 Ferruginous Ducks, with several White-headed Ducks nearby. The lagoon was covered with Eurasian Coot – an incredible 8200 was the estimate! Other highlights included, 310 Greater Flamingos, many Eared and Little Grebes, and 25 Great Crested Grebes, with two occupying nests at the water's edge. Their nests were mounds of vegetation. There were two distant Marsh Harriers, and a Whiskered Tern flying around at the back of the lake. In addition, there were at

least half a dozen Black-winged Stilts, a female Northern Shoveler, quite a few lovely Red-crested Pochards, hundreds of the Canvasback-like Common Pochards, and, at least 30 or 40 Glossy Ibis flying in and out of the lagoon. It was a wonderful experience. The light was perfect and the birds plentiful, lovely, and cooperative.

We left the lagoon at 6:30 p.m. and arrived at our hotel in Zahara at 7:30 p.m. We unloaded out front, and Christian and I put the vans in the parking lot down the street. We did the list and had dinner at 8:15 p.m. The locals were coming to dinner as we were heading off to bed. Amazing.

Day 4, Sept 4: Zahara de los Atunes estuary; road thru Facinas; coastal road to Algarrobes (carob tree) raptor migration point facing Gibraltar; lunch at Huerta Grande; CIMA research station at Tarifa point; Bolonia area.

We met in the lobby at 7:30 a.m. for an early a.m. walk. We went out the back door and walked along the path beside the river heading towards the ocean. There was a Spoonbill in the estuary at first light, along with 25 Little Egrets and a Grey Heron, which were joined later by another 40 Little Egrets. Oddly, there was an Iberian hare on the mud flats to the north. A stop at the bridge revealed a Little Owl perched on the telephone wire across the way. It was nearly invisible against the hillside. Eventually it flew to the hillside and perched on a boulder.



We continued down towards the ocean where we stopped and scanned the beach. There were nine Audouin's Gulls (rare), a couple of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and a few Yellow-legged Gulls resting on the sand, and a couple of Kentish and Common Ringed Plovers and some Sanderling, feeding in the inlet. We returned to the restaurant for breakfast at 8:30 a.m., and departed about 9:15 a.m. We headed towards Tarifa to take in the migration.

Our first stop was at a rest area overlooking Gibraltar which produced a nice array of migrating raptors moving through. Booted and Short-toed Eagles were in the majority, and we saw one lovely Montague's Harrier, a male. Our second viewing sight was on the hill in Algarrobes, where nearly 800 White Storks flew through along with many Booted and Short-toed Eagles. We were fortunate to get stellar views of an immature Bonelli's eagle, as well. **Griffon Vultures**, Honey Buzzards and Eurasian Bee-eaters also put on quite a show. We stayed until about 1 p.m. and then drove to the gardens at Huerta Grande to eat lunch, where there were Crested Tits, Firecrest and our first European Robin.

After lunch, we drove to an area near Bolonia to look for Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin (Bush Robin), but without success. We did see a Golden Oriole, Thekla Larks, and many bee-eaters while driving back to the hotel for 6:30 p.m. arrival. We did the list and started dinner at 7:30 p.m.

Day 5: Sept 5: Zahara de los Atunes estuary, briefly in a.m.; La Janda (rice fields that were former wetlands); lunch; etc.; beer at the small town of Benalup; then Montenmedio Golf Course; Barbate Marshes (Rio Barbate at bridge and marsh spot)

We met for an early morning walk along the estuary at 7:30 a.m., and returned for breakfast at the hotel around 8 a.m. After breakfast, we went to La Janda, a large farming area, once a wetland, with expansive plowed farm fields and flooded rice fields. The rice impoundments attract White Storks, of which there were many, and we saw a Black-winged Kite perched on a power line. On our way into the area, there were flocks of Linnets, European Goldfinch, **Corn Buntings**, and Spanish Sparrows, all of which were quite skittish. The Spanish Sparrows flew in very tight flocks. We saw our first Purple Heron on the side of one of the drainage ditches, and a Eurasian Snipe (often hard to see during migration) on top of one of the dikes along with our first Green Sandpapers and Wood Sandpipers.



After lunch, we scanned a pond beside the road where there were several hundred Glossy Ibis, our first Ruff, a Wood Sandpiper, several Green Sandpipers, a few Eurasian Coots and a Moorhen. A low flying Alpine Swift came by very close to the group, and others were passing high overhead. Migrating raptors consisted mostly of Booted Eagles, with a couple of Short-toed Eagles. We also witnessed some impressive flocks of migrating White Storks and large feeding flocks of Jackdaws. Our stop at nearby forest produced incredible views of a roosting Red-necked Nightjar. We also saw a male Lesser Kestrel and a distant European Roller on a hill-top irrigation machine. Remarkably, I saw my life roller the irrigation sprinkler heads here many years ago.

We then drove to the little town of Benalup and had coffee, and I got to practice parallel parking in tight spaces :0). Heading back towards the hotel, we stopped at a golf course to search for **N. Bald Ibis**. The flock erupted from the course as we parked, and we counted 20 ibis as they circled overhead, before being informed by a grounds keeper that groups were no longer allowed on the course. The Ibis flew towards their roost. Huge numbers of jackdaws were seen circling around a nearby town.

On our way back, we stopped at the Barbate estuary near our hotel to look for shorebirds, gulls, and waders. There were many **Yellow-legged** and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, a few Black-headed Gulls, our first Whimbrels and Common Redshanks, and many Common Ringed Plovers and other shorebirds. We ate a lovely dinner at the hotel. Again, patrons were arriving to dine as we were heading to bed. Folks eat late in the south of Spain.



Day 6: Sept 6: Early a.m. Zahara Estuary; Algarroba hawk watch, 10:00 - 12:45; lunch at El Pozuela; Almarchal area for Bush-Robin; SE portion of Barbate Marshes/Estuary



Met at 7:30 a.m. for a walk—same cast of characters along the estuary as on other days. We refound the Little Owl on the



rock outcrop. Zitting Cisticola was in the dunes. A Marsh Harrier flew by giving us nice views. Paul, Jay and Susan went to the beach and saw 6 Cory's Shearwaters, and a Balearic Shearwater.

Breakfast was at 8 a.m. We left at nine and went straight to el Algarroba Hawk watch. It was a very good morning with a nice movement of birds. Groups of hundreds of **White Storks** went by, followed shortly after by 4 Black storks, which flew by fairly close below the sun. They were our first for the trip. Nine more came through later.

There was also an impressive movement of swallows and swifts, including a few Red-rumped Swallows. Mixed raptor flocks included good numbers of **Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Black Kites**, Egyptian and Griffon Vultures, and there was also one flock of 45 bee-eaters. A young



Bonelli's Eagle attacked, hit, and almost took out a Marsh Harrier. Marsh Harrier feathers came floating down after the strike. Later the Bonelli's went after a Booted Eagle which also barely escaped. It was a great day for Egyptian Vultures; most were adults, and we had some great views as they went overhead. Our first and only Common Swifts were seen flying along

the ridge. They looked black against the hills with cleaner throats than Pallids. Sardinian Warblers and Blue Tits were again singing in the area. There was a nice assortment of other birding groups visiting the hawk watch. There was even a guide that Diane, Annette, and Betsy knew from Madagascar.

We left Algarroba around 12:45 to have lunch at El Pozuelo. The meal was delightful, with fresh fish, salmorejo soup, and homemade yogurt. After lunch we hiked up a valley lined with wild olives near the town of Almarchal to look for Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin. We had the good

fortune to see Iberian Chiffchaff and Willow Warblers together, and we were able to compare leg color and other field marks.

Sardinian Warblers were singing along the road; a few were seen. We had a nice look at two Woodchat Shrikes, an adult and a young bird, in a bush on the hill. We also saw quite a few Short-toed Eagles hovering around over the fields, and a Marsh Harrier.

I had another chance to herd sheep by van as we were leaving the valley to go to the Barbate River to look for **Stone Curlews**. The Stone Curlews cooperated nicely; it's always a hoot when the "rocks" stand up and start walking around. There was also a nice little movement of songbird migrants, and we saw Melodious Warbler, several Iberian Chiffchaffs, and a Willow Warbler feeding in the thickets on the hill. At the edge of the plowed field on the hilltop, several Greater Short-toed Larks gave us nice views, showing off their rusty caps, and separate flocks of Calandra Larks and Crested Larks also made an appearance. The Calandra's wing pattern looks like that of a mini Little Gull. We headed back to the hotel for dinner and to pack to leave tomorrow for Seville in the morning.



Day 7: 7 SEP -- Roadside stop for WR Swift just S of Barbate; S. Barbate Marshes for Thick-knees again; Laguna Medina; high-speed train from Seville to Zaragoza; drive in dark to Hotel Guara in Bierge.

After breakfast, we packed the vans and drove to the Barbate River where we saw 37 Stone Curlews, two Little Stints, three Little Terns and a few Crested Larks. We then headed towards Laguna de Medina, but stopped along the way when a rare White-rumped Swift flew by us.

Eventually, everyone saw it well as if fed over the dunes with many Barn Swallows, showing off its long tail and white rump. Many Calandra Larks were also passing along the dunes. We made another stop to look at a Buzzard that may have been a hybrid with Long-legged Buzzard.



Along the way, we also saw a fair number of raptors, including a Common Kestrel and several Black Kites near Seville. We stopped at Laguna de Medina for an hour and found 10 White-headed Ducks, a few Ferruginous Ducks, thousands of Eurasian Coots, a moorhen, a Swamp Hen, several Purple Herons, a few Great-crested Grebes, and lots of Little and Black-necked Grebes, Red-crested Pochards and Common Pochards.

We then continued to Seville, dropped everyone at the train station, and Cristian and I returned the vehicle. We boarded the high-speed train at 3:55 p.m. It usually takes about 3 hours to reach Zaragoza, but the train stopped for 20+ minutes for some undisclosed reason. We arrived around 7:30 in Zaragoza where we were met by Jaume. Jaume and I went to get the rental car, which took a while because their system crashed. We left around 9:00 p.m. and arrived at the wonderful hotel Guara, in Beige, at 10:30 p.m...

We first ordered dinner, so they could get our dinner going, and then we checked in. We went up to our rooms and came right back down to eat. The hotel staff was fantastic. The hotel is run by two sisters; they were incredibly helpful and couldn't have been nicer. The food was terrific and their hotel is really beautiful.



Day 8: Sept 8: Sierra de Guara area near hotel in Bierge: Yaso; Santa Cilia; vulture museum; Alquezar

After our late night, we opted for a late breakfast. We met at 8 a.m. for an optional bird walk, and enjoyed breakfast at 8:30 a.m. on the veranda. The spread was amazing. There were incredible amounts of cheeses, hams, and sausages, and lots of different breads. They brought us omelets, and they even made special bread and had cheese to meet everyone's dietary needs.

The Guara hotel has a lovely almond grove across the street and they grow their own vegetables. The early morning birders walked down the road to the little village and back. One Red-rumped Swallow and lots of Barn Swallows were seen going by over the fields. There were a few Linnets and



we saw a Great-spotted Woodpecker fly to a tree. After breakfast, we drove into the mountains past Yaso, to a flat-topped hill overlooking cliffs to the north, where a Lammergeier and **Griffon Vulture** feeding station is situated. There were more than a hundred Griffon Vultures sitting on the cliffs when we arrived, many of which flew out to see us (thinking we were going to feed them), and circled low over our heads. Susan found a young **Egyptian Vulture** on the cliffs, and later another showed up and landed beside it.

While the Egyptian Vultures were flying down the ridge, a larger, similarly shaped vulture popped up over the hill – it was a magnificent Lammergeier. It flew down the ridge, circled around the area where they feed the vultures, and eventually dropped onto the cliff, where it ran around a bit before it snatched up a bone and flew off. It was truly amazing to see one on the ground – they are impressive enough in the air – and to watch it run around with its little rust-colored booties. I'm always impressed with their size, and although they are similar in shape to Egyptian Vulture, they have all black wings and tail, unlike the white wings and tail of the Egyptian Vultures. Suddenly, just after the Lammergeier flew off, there was a rushing noise, and a Golden Eagle (probably the one we'd seen perched on a pinnacle) dropped out of the sky right beside us! It then circled up, hung in the air above us for a while, then drifted higher with the vultures. The views were magnificent! To round out the experience, our first Northern Wheatear popped up on a nearby bush.

Before lunch, we walk down to the Vulture Museum in the village and watched a nice animated display presentation. Our museum guide was very nice, was fluent in English, and he explained the worldwide vulture conservation projects they do. Sales from the beautiful t-shirts that many from our group bought will support their vulture conservation work.

We ate lunch in a little park across from the museum, which overlooked the mountains and a small valley where Barn Swallows and House-Martins were feeding. After lunch, we drove back to the hotel, with a quick stop to look for a Blue Rock thrush seen in Yaso. The village was lovely. We took a half an hour break at the hotel before driving to the medieval town of **Alcazar**.



As we were readying to depart, a lovely Red Kite flew low over the parking lot giving us our closet views of one. Alcazar was impressive. Predominately tile-roofed stone buildings, the town was restored in the 1980s and 1990s and has become a popular tourist destination. We enjoyed a



walk around town, had a drink at one of the open-air pubs, and managed to see a few birds, including a Pied Flycatcher and a Redstart in the gardens where we had coffee, and our target – Blue Rock Thrush. The “little blue bird”, a Blue Rock Thrush was seen on the face of the cliff across from the overlook and below the church. There were also a Black Redstart

on the wall, swallows, and a couple of Common Ravens. We went back to the hotel at 6:45 p.m. and had a break for an hour before dinner. **Dinner was as good as expected.**

Day 9: Sept 9: Bierge vulture feeding station area; Loporzano wheatear overlook; Montearagon Castle; lunch at Guargas along Rio Guarga; border with France at Col du Pourtalet; Urdues dipper spot. Night in Siresa.



Today, we transferred from the Guara hotel to the Castillo de Archer hotel in Siresa, near Hecho. Our first stop was on a side road, beside a blind overlooking a Griffin Vulture feeding station, not far from the hotel. When we arrived, a young Griffin Vulture was perched in a tree over the feeding station, and provided us nice views. Common Redstarts, Willow Warblers and Carrion Crows were also in the area.

We drove back to Jaca, which is a rather big town, then continued West toward the Hecho Valley. In Loporzano, we made a stop at an overlook, opposite **Montearagon Castle**, to look for

Black Wheatear; we found four, as well as a tagged young Egyptian Vulture perched in a cave on the cliff face. A Tree Pipit flew by calling, as well.

We continued on to the castle, where our first stop at the bend below the castle, produced some great birds – 2 pairs of Black Wheatears, 2 Blue Rock Thrush, a **European Stonechat**, a Woodchat Shrike, a Sardinian Warbler, and a beautiful female Greater Whitethroat feeding in the vine tangles below the cliffs. At our stop near the castle, there was a mixed feeding flock of Greater Whitethroats, Common Redstarts, Sardinian Warblers and Stonechats feeding in bushes on the hillside.



Lunch was at a small park along the Rio Guargas where Pied Flycatchers were the bird of the day. At least 15 were seen migrating through the area. The group was able to walk near the river while I watched the vans.

We continued on towards Serisa and made a quick stop at the dam at Embalse de Búbal to check for Wallcreeper. There were quite a few Crag-Martins nesting on the dam.



We continued to Col du Pourtalet/Portalet, a small resort town that straddles the boarder with France.

Although there were migrating Common Kestrels, swallows, and a flock of choughs cavorting over the hilltops, rains drove us to the warmth and comfort of a small pub in Portalet, on the Spanish side of the town. The barista was a wizard and produced coffees and hot chocolates for everyone in record time. Interestingly, the attached market sold **wine and port from wooden casks**.



We then drove to the Hecho valley and stopped at a side canyon, on the road to Urdues, to look for Wallcreeper on the cliff face. They sometimes winter there. There were and number of Griffin Vultures sitting around, including one sitting on a pinnacle above an old nest with a carcass in it. We saw our first White-throated Dipper as it flew down the river, went under the bridge, and vanished. We couldn't read find it, but there were old dipper nests under the bridge, so there's a good chance it lived in the area.

We continued up the valley and spotted our first Carrion Crows and a few Common Buzzards in fields and on the wires, through Hecho, to the Castillo de Archer Hotel, a beautiful stone building in the town of Siresa. More than 50 House-Martin's came to sleep in old nests on the

building across the street, at sunset.

Day 10: Sept 10: Drove up Anso Valley w/ stops for Dipper and at Mirador Trasveral; Zuriza; into Navarra and Belagua Valley; into France at La Pierre de la Saint Martin; back down and stop at Refugio de Linza.

The forecast predicted rain, but it was sunny with blue skies. After breakfast, we drove west to Anso and up the Anso Valley, stopping first at a stream, where we had nice views of a White-throated Dipper feeding in the shallow water and jumping up on rocks.



From there, we stopped at a roadside platform where there were many birds, including Common Chiffchaff, Blackcaps (which are large), our first Marsh Tits, Crested Tits and Firecrests. We also saw the only Eurasian Treecreeper for the tour, confirmed by eBird reviewers from photos and video submitted with the checklist. We then drove to a coffee shop in Refugio de Zuriza, for a quick break, where there were White Wagtails on the roof (a good omen). There were also two singing **Coal Tits** showing nicely at the edge of the parking lot, and a cooperative Chaffinch.

We then went up to Refugio de Belagua, a parking area/overlook near a chalet-like building, where we saw a Water Pipit sitting on a windowsill, a few Northern Wheatears, and some Linnets feeding in the valley. There were 75 Red-billed Coughs feeding in the area, as well.

We continued to the end of the valley, with a stop to look into a cave, just over the border in France, where Alpine Choughs are known to roost. We found a pair of Dunnocks feeding beside the cave entrance - our first and only for the trip.



At our lunch stop, also in France, we walked up to a meadow where we managed to find an Alpine Accentor! We were also treated to the spectacle of a huge flock of bell-toting sheep wending down the mountain, before fog rolled in to engulf us, and created a rather surreal scene. While we were eating, we also had nice looks at a family of **Citril Finches** along the road, and a few Red Crossbills and Water Pipit flew by us.

We drove back into Spain, and then up another valley to Refugio de Linza, where we were able to photograph adorable baby **Crag-Martins** in their nests under the eaves of the lodge there. We took a walk over the bridge and up the valley looking for Black Woodpecker. Along the way, Eurasian Goldfinches were in the bushes by the footbridge with Black Redstarts, and Serins were feeding by the river with Grey Wagtails. Two Egyptian vultures flew over



while we scanned the hills for chamois. We returned to the hotel by 6:30 p.m., did the list at 7:30 p.m., and ate dinner.

Day 11: Sept 11: Refugio de Gabardito where we tried for Wallcreeper in a.m.; Valle de Aguas Tuertas incl Boca del Infierno where we saw Wallcreeper.



Breakfast was at 8 a.m. and we left at 9 a.m. on a sunny day with blue skies. We drove up the Hecho Valley, took a side road through a valley with shaded mixed forest all the way to the end. We hiked from the parking lot through the forest making stops along the way. We ran into some Coal Tits, Firecrests, Great Tits, Blue Tits, and a group of Blackcaps and Chaffinch feeding n bushes down the hill from the trail, and a European Robin near the end. It's a very nice hike on a gentle grade, with a few switchbacks through



more rocky areas near the end, where there is a rock face where Wallcreepers have nested in a vertical crack. Red-billed Cough and Alpine Cough nest in the area, as well. We saw Alpine Choughs above the ridge opposite our position, and a couple of Red-billed Choughs landed on the cliff above us. We laid on our backs to look at the cliff face hoping to see Wallcreeper. Both a Black Woodpecker and a Green Woodpecker were calling up the valley. On our hike back, we managed to get quick looks at a Eurasian Wren that was singing from boxwood, a flock of assorted tit species, and a Short-toed Treecreeper and Chaffinch.

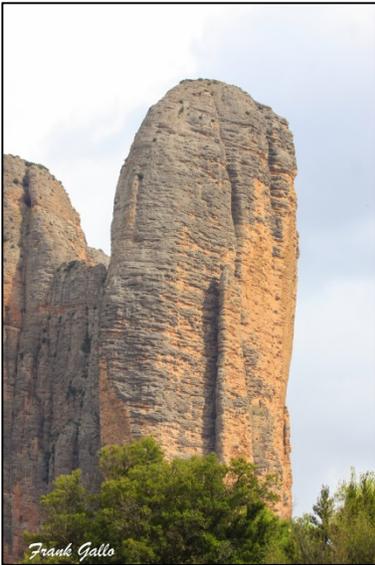
We drove back to the restaurant, had a nice lunch, and went back out at 3 p.m. We headed up the main canyon to Valle de Aguas Tuertas, where we had to drive through a herd of **cows walking**

down the valley. This is a good valley for marmots, and we weren't disappointed. Nice views were had of many yellow-bellied marmots, perhaps 7, some very close to the road, and several were together on a little ridge near us.

The major excitement for the day was on our way up the valley, we stopped again at Boca del Infierno, where those quiet words "I'm looking at a Wallcreeper" were uttered by Lorna, first to everyone's disbelief, and then to the sheer joy of all concerned. Wallcreeper!

Day 12: Sept 12: Transfer Day Siresa walk for Tree Pipit; jct of road to Urdues; Monasterio San Juan de la Pena (old then new); with a stop afterwards for Black Woodpecker; roads past Riglos; Castillo Loarre; arriving at Rincon del Cierzo hotel in Lecera.

Today we transferred to Belchite. Leaving Serisa, we stopped at the edge of town to scan the fields where Jay and Susan found Olive Tree Pipits on their early a.m. walk. The Tree Pipits wandered through the grass and occasionally perched in the shrubs along with migrating Blackcaps and a Willow Warbler. We then drove again to the Urdues Valley Road to look for Wallcreeper and Dipper. We saw several Black Redstarts on top of the hill. As always, there were Carrion Crows and buzzards along the highway on the way down the valley, along with a few Sirens and goldfinch.



We stopped at the monetary San Jaun de la Pena, where we glimpsed and heard Tawny Owl and toured the parking area near the new Monastery on top. We then made a successful run for Black Woodpecker, which circled all around the group, flying from tree to tree. After a nice coffee, we continued on to **Riglos** where we photographed climbers scaling the sheer cliffs, which resemble ones from the New Mexican desert. We made a brief visit to the ancient Castillo Loarre, where overcast skies set a rather moody scene. The birds were quiet, so we drove on to Rincon del Cierzo Hotel in Lecera, the hidden treasure behind a gas station.

Day 13: Sept 13: El Planeron at dawn for Dupont's Lark; back for breakfast; Belchite area for Pin-tailed Sandgrouse; Bujaraloz lunch at El Espanol; Bujaraloz area for Great Bustard; back through El Planeron.

Today we left early to go for the rare DuPont's Lark. The Dupont's Larks were singing when we arrived. We tried taping them in from the vans, and although one came fairly close and giving an alarm call, it wasn't seen. After coffee and a snack, we tried standing outside the van at the top of the hill. Several people were lucky enough to see one run through the grass past us. They are such tricky birds.... The area was lark central, so we drove around a bit and were able to get nice views of several Lesser Short-toed Larks in a field just off the road – they are smaller and grayer than Greater Short-toed.



We then drove to the chalk factory area to look for sandgrouse. We came across 6 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse in a field spotted by Paul Walter, and we all enjoyed great looks. The bird eventually flew showing their white bellies in flight. A little farther along, I found a Great Grey Shrike perched on a hilltop tree. We drove back the way we came and found a young male Pin-tailed Sandgrouse in the same field as the earlier group, and we were able to get out and scope it. It snuck around through the field and we were able to enjoy very good views.



Another highlight along our return drive, was finding a covey of migrant **Common Quail** that ran along the side of the road and gave everyone fantastic views and photo ops. As with any quail, they can be hard to find even where they're common.

We then drove north and east for about 45 minutes and stopped for a wonderful buffet lunch, complete with a chocolate fountain, at El Espanol, and then we went to an agricultural area to search for bustards. We eventually found **two Great Bustards** (very rare now, populations have plummeted in the last 6 years) in a moist alfalfa field where Juama remembered they sometimes go when it is dry. On a side road, we sidled up to a couple of cooperative Winchats, a young Woodchat Strike that flew from post to post, had distant views of a Great Grey Shrike, and enjoyed great looks at a European Roller perched on the sprinkler heads. Several Yellow Wagtails and a Zitting Cisticola were flying around as well.

On our way back to the Hotel Rincon, we returned briefly to the area for DuPont's Lark. We heard several and had looks at Lesser Short-toed Larks, a couple of fly over a Greater Short-toed Larks, and a number of Thekla and Crested Larks feeding in the fields and along the roads. It turned out to be a rewarding day, topped off by a wonderful dinner, as well.



Day 14: Sept 14: *Belchite (old town); El Planeron; Belchite wind farm; La Estanca de Alcaniz; pond across road from La Estanca; Flix for LSpWP; Miravet for LSpWP; cliffs for Eagle Owl. Night at Ebro Delta.*

Breakfast at 7:30 a.m. left the Rincon at 8:15 a.m., got gas, and headed for Belchite, where we made a brief stop to talk about and photograph the ruins. There were several Blue Rock Thrushes around the site. We then drove to the Dupont's Lark area looking for sandgrouse along the way. While searching for the sandgrouse, we flushed a flock of eight Red-legged Partridge that nearly gave us all a heart attack. At the Dupont's site, we heard several DuPont's Larks and saw many other larks of several species, including several flyover Greater Short-toed Larks, and one Lesser Short-toed Lark on the ground in the road. Lessers are very small and look grey compared to the Greater Short-toed Lark, which look brown and have a brown cap. Their calls are similar, but the Lesser sounds a bit like a Dickcissel, and a Greater gives a more-raspy rattle.

We then drove through the Steppes to an old watering hole looking for Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Unfortunately, the area had dried up and there were no sandgrouse around. We did see another Iberian Grey Shrike and a Woodchat Shrike.



On our way south, we went to a wind turbine farm to look again for Black-bellied Sandgrouse. The sandgrouse didn't cooperate, but we did see some distant Lesser Kestrels, and some folks saw a distant Hobby. We continued south, to a lagoon lake for lunch, where there were two Ferruginous Ducks (rare and always a treat), some Red-crested Pochards, Great Crested and Little Grebes, Eurasian Coots and our first Eurasian Wigeon. A lovely Kingfisher also made a brief appearance. At our coffee stop at a gas station, there were almond trees with ripe almonds out back.

A very nice local park ranger, stopped and told us about a nearby lagoon where she'd seen Bluethroat earlier in the day, and then she drove us to the site. To everyone's delight, there were two Northern Lapwings in the wetland, our first, Black-winged Stilts, and several Little-ringed and Common-ringed Plovers. We had our best looks at a Red-rumped Swallow that flew low over the wetland, and a Common Reed Warbler was seen in the reeds and tamarisk, and we heard a large migrating flock of bee-eaters passing by us.



Continuing south, we stopped twice to search for Lesser-spotted Woodpecker along the way, once at a streamside poplar stand in Flix, and then again, by a **ferry landing**; no woodpeckers. We then went to an overlook into a canyon to check a roost for Eurasian Eagle Owl. The roost showed plenty of whitewash and feathers, but the Owl was not visible. We did get to see a couple of Wood Larks flying around the area.

We then drove into the beautiful Ebro Delta and to our hotel, Mediterranean Blau. Along the way, Grey Herons, Little and Great Egrets, and masses of waders and gulls were feeding in the rice fields, which were starting to be harvested. A few folks glimpsed a Gull-billed Tern over one of the fields, and there were many Black-headed, Yellow-legged, and some Lesser Black-backed Gulls feeding in the fields, as well as a few Slender-billed and Audouin's Gulls flying to roost. The evening light was lovely. The sheer numbers of birds had everyone excited for the following day's explorations. Dinner at the hotel was delicious. Many people sampled the local paella.

Day 15: Sept 15: Riet Vell Reserve (near hotel) of Spanish Ornithological Society (SEO); Banya (sand spit); Salines Velles (old salt pans); rice field drivebys; coffeeshop during rain; Migjorn area tower; sod farm in same area.



Many people took early morning walks, some to the beach, others' to the blind at Riet Vell. After breakfast, we drove to the blind at Riet Vell. Outside the gift shop there, was a tree with many House and European Tree Sparrows in it, and they provided memorable views. We walked by the rice fields to the blind and set up. There were several Squacco Herons around, a couple very close to the blind, and a Little Bittern that played hide-and-seek for a while, but was eventually seen well by everyone. There were also several Common Shelducks and quite a few Greater Flamingos. There was a Reed Warbler near the blind, several Purple Swamphens, at least one of which was feeding young, and several Caspian Terns flying around; the adults were calling, and



their babies were whistling. A group of Slender-billed and Black-headed Gulls also flew over us, and a few Spotted Redshanks flew around the pool and joined some feeding Black-winged Stilts. Several Little Grebes, Mallards, moorhens with babies (cute), were present, and there were many Black-crowned Night-Herons roosting in the trees at the back of the pool.



After visiting the gift shop, we drove out the Banya peninsula towards the salt factory. On the way, there were several cooperative **Mediterranean Gulls** and Slender-billed Gulls, of differing ages, on the beach, our first 2 European Shags swimming in the water, and Kentish Plovers, Black-bellied Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, and Sanderling were feeding along the bay shore. We also enjoyed nice views of **Audouin's Gulls** of various ages. There were many people out for a beach clean-up, and quite a few folks fishing, especially at the end near the salt factory where we stopped briefly to look around. There were a few Great Cormorants, and quite a few Audouin's Gulls on the rocks by the factory. This is a regional stronghold for these rare gulls.

We moved next to Salines Velles, an area with a roadside hide overlooking salt pans, where we scanned the pools on both sides of the road. There was a Subalpine Warbler flying around the edge of the parking area, and many shorebirds and waders in the pools, including our first Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits. We also found Little Stints, a Mute Swan (status unknown), many flamingos, and a few Common Sandpipers. A few Little Terns were flying around, as were 110 Gloss Ibis. The pools also held both, Spotted and Common Redshanks, a young



male Northern Pintail, 3 Northern Shovelers, and a large group of **Caspian Terns**, with a few Whiskered Terns mixed in. We were also lucky enough to see two Whimbrels that flew by showing us their white backs, and a beautiful **Eurasian Curlew**. Our next stop was to be the tower and sod fields in the Migjorn area on the north side of the Ebro delta, but we could see a lightning storm and heavy rain to the north of us, so we decided to stop at a little pub along the way for a coffee



and to let the heavy rains pass. Our strategy paid off, and the rain let up enough that we could visit the observation tower. On the way to it, we saw a couple of Black Terns (new) flying around over the rice fields with Whiskered Terns, and hordes of an invasive American crayfish challenging us on the road with their claws raised. They lost.

The pools by the tower were hopping; we saw slews of birds, including at least 16 Black-tailed Godwits, several more Bar-tailed Godwits, many other species, including a few close Red Crested Pochards behind us, flocks of flamingos, and our first Curlew Sandpipers feeding with Dunlin and Ruffs. There were a few Little Stints, and our first **Pied Avocets** strutted around among the many Black-winged Stilts. It was a beautiful sight to behold.



We then went to a nearby **Sod Farm** where the storm had dropped hundreds of birds, including



several hundred Yellow Wagtails, many Common Ringed Plovers, a few Little Ringed Plovers and Kentish Plovers, Common and **Spotted Redshanks**, Greenshanks, and a slew of other shorebirds. The whole sod farm was covered with birds. We enjoyed wonderful views of a rare Temminck's Stint, and while scanning a plowed field near an irrigation machine, I discovered **Collared Pratincoles**, pretending to be dirt clods. Closer inspection revealed 71 Pratincoles hidden in the plowed field. Eventually,

the pratincoles flew into the sod farm, to feed and run around among the wagtails, and gave us amazing views. It was wonderful to be able to see their dark underwings and red "armpits." It was especially gratifying as it was a life bird for everyone,



including me. A European Golden Plover was generous enough to make an appearance in the field behind the irrigation machine, and it fed with a group of wood sandpipers and other shorebirds. It too, was cooperative enough to lift its wings and show us its diagnostic bright



white underwing linings; they are a big bulky golden plover!



Towards sunset, we were fortunate to witness a true spectacle of nature, as flock-after-flock of **Greater Flamingos**, Glossy Ibis, and masses of gulls flew past overhead, wheeling off to their roosts or feeding areas for the night. Adding to the show was a large flock of starlings swirling around above, and almost in time with, the constant motion of the

many feeding shorebirds and several subspecies of Yellow Wagtails, carpeting and racing around the sod farm fields. There were so many birds, we could have spent hours more scanning through the rice and sod fields, however, our last dinner together was calling... Paella was again a star of the evening.

What a great ending to a wonderful tour. We ended up with 215 bird species for the trip, an all-time high. I want to thank everyone for a wonderful adventure together.



Day 16: Sept 16: Riet Vell Reserve for 45 min before breakfast; then driving to Barcelona airport with only a gas station stop outside Tarragona. We and Lorna are dropped off, while rest of group will stay overnight in Barcelona. Flights home are smooth.

We met at 7:30 a.m., and drove to Riet Vell to sit in the blind one last time. We had nice looks at several Squacco

Hérons, the **Little Bittern** sat out, and we had brief views of 2 distant young Penduline Tits (new) that flew from right to left and landed in the reeds. Green Sandpipers were in the pools and a Reed Warbler, and a **Squacco Heron** came close to the blind. There were a few Caspian Terns, and one of the Common Shellducks around. As a finale, a stunning kingfisher landed on a stick near the blind and stayed for a photo shoot!

The crew came to check the turtle traps again, as they did yesterday, but they took a group photo for us before they did. We went back for an 8:30 breakfast. Loaded the cars at 9:15 and left at 9:30 a.m. There was a mix of hundreds of gulls, egrets, ibis and Grey Herons feeding in the rice fields on the way out of town. We drove the two hours back to the airport Terminal 1 in Barcelona, with a stop at a gas station where we heard monk parakeets. The station was near Jauma's house, so he dropped off his gear while we drank a coffee. We arrived at the airport before lunch, dropped off everyone, and Jauma and I returned the rental cars. Many of the group stayed for a fun night in Barcelona...



