

TRIP REPORT Frances and Judith Mini Wildlife mini tour autumn 2022

Staying at Hotel Rural Salvatierra in Salvatierra de Tormes, Salamanca

Day 1 Tuesday 29th November:

Upper Tormes river at Puente del Congosto, and Sta. Teresa reservoir.

On our way out of Salvatierra, Frances spotted a Brambling at the top of a small tree, as well as Chaffinch and Chiffchaff. On a cable were a few House and Rock sparrows. We then drove around the Santa Teresa reservoir and stopped at the lower end of the reservoir overlooking an inlet close to where the Tormes river flows into the reservoir area. Here Judith spotted a Kingfisher on a rock. Two Pintails seen as we drove down flew off amongst a group of Mallard, possibly frightened by a fox which Alfonso spotted, being mobbed by Magpies and Jays. The Pintails were later seen in the middle of the reservoir, where there were also Lesser black-backed and Black-headed gull. In the inlet there were two Little grebes and a Great crested grebe.

A Red Kite in a field opposite, flew and perched just above a Grey heron in a Holm oak, with Iberian magpies, in the tree and on the ground feeding, un-phased by the Kite's presence. Frances spotted a Sparrowhawk flying low above a field opposite and a pair of Jays flew through. We also saw male and female Stonechat perched on stalks, White wagtail, Song thrush and House sparrow, and a Cormorant flying over the reservoir.



Red kite

Flocks of Goldfinch and Linnet fed on weeds at the edge of the inlet, with one Hoopoe. A flock of Rock sparrows flew up to a holm oak and later onto a wire where they kept spinning round whenever we tried to see their yellow rectangle!

We then drove to the village of Puente del Congosto, seeing Red kite, Buzzard and Iberian magpie on the way. Here we parked on the far side of the river and had coffee watching Spotless starling and House sparrow, with Goldfinch and Greenfinch feeding amongst the vegetation. We walked along a track parallel to the river, between granite drystone walls and Mediterranean scrub, with Holm oak pasture amongst granite boulders.



View towards Puente del Congosto



We caught a brief glimpse of a Dartford warbler darting into a bush, and in the fields were Meadow pipit and Song thrush, with Woodlark feeding on the track. Buzzard and Red kite perched or flew, and as the day warmed up there were Griffon and Black vulture, with a Peregrine falcon flying high. Sparrowhawk, Robin, Black redstart, Chiffchaff, Chaffinch, Rock bunting and a Clouded yellow butterfly were all seen as we headed downstream to a dike and an old mill for our picnic.

In a Willow just a few metres away were a small flock of Long-tailed tit, and in the river there were White and Grey wagtail.



Clouded yellow *Colias crocea*



Long-tailed tit



After lunch we headed back to the village and the medieval bridge. The river hemmed in by granite was high and fast here with plenty of waterfalls. We visited the village and Veton granite boar, and looked from the 'new' bridge before heading up to the dike.



On the way we watched a Kingfisher very close by on a branch over the water, which flew onto a tree before disappearing upstream, as well as White and Grey wagtail. Above the dike we went through some riverine woodland with Alder and Poplars. Here we saw Iberian grey shrike, Nuthatch, Blue tit and Raven.



Grey wagtail



White wagtail

From Puente del Congosto we drove towards the reservoir, stopping to watch two cranes feeding in a field.



Eurasian crane



We drove on to an eastern inlet of the reservoir where Alfonso and I take part in the crane census every year. Here we parked and watched a lone Griffon vulture roosting in a Holm oak whilst we waited for the Cranes to fly over.



Griffon vulture





There was a spectacular sunset as the Cranes flew towards their roosting area, first in small family groups and later in large skeins. Alfonso counted 271 in total.



Species day 1:	Birds		Mammals
Brambling	Sparrowhawk	Griffon vulture	Fox
Chaffinch	Goldfinch	Black vulture	
Chiffchaff	Linnet	Peregrine falcon	Invertebrates:
Rock sparrow	Hoopoe	Robin	Clouded yellow butterfly
House sparrow	Stonechat	Black redstart	
Kingfisher	White wagtail	Rock bunting	
Pintail	Song thrush	Long-tailed tit	
Mallard	Cormorant	Grey wagtail	
Little grebe	L. black-backed gull	Iberian shrike	
Great crested grebe	Black-headed gull	Nuthatch	
Magpie	Buzzard	Blue tit	
Red Kite	Greenfinch	Raven	
Grey heron	Meadow pipit	Crane	
Iberian magpie	Dartford warbler		
Jay	Woodlark		

The following day forecast rain showers where we were headed so we opted to have a break and wait until Thursday to continue the tour.

Day 2 Thursday 1st December:

Laguna del Cristo and Peña de Francia

It started off very cold (-5°C) and foggy, but by the time Alfonso and I got to the village the fog was beginning to lift. We headed west, skirting north of the Sierra de Quilamas and parked up a track between fields in the Campo Charro near Tamames. Here we saw Thekla lark, Iberian shrike, Buzzard, Red kite, Rock sparrow in the bushes and on cables, Mistle thrush, Iberian magpie, Griffon vulture, Crow and Kestrel.



Iberian grey shrike



We drove on to the Laguna del Cristo but visibility was poor because of the fog. We decided to come back later during our coffee break we managed to see Mallard, Shoveler, Teal, Griffon vulture, Robin, Linnet, Stonechat, Chaffinch and Iberian shrike. We stopped briefly at another smaller lagoon where we saw Green sandpiper, Lapwing, Little grebe, Cormorant, Mistle thrush and Thekla lark. In the village of Moras Verdes we stopped to see Cirl bunting and Serin on a gate, and as we approached the Sierra de Francia we turned back when Judith and I spotted a Great bustard in the middle of a field, which we watched until it flew off.



Great bustard in flight

We also saw Marsh harrier, Buzzard and Kestrel here. On the way up to the Peña we stopped and watched some Black and Griffon vultures, and the spectacular views.



Griffon vulture in flight



Black vulture



At the top we searched for Alpine accentor, eventually seeing them amongst rocks below the main esplanade. There were also Crag martin, Meadow pipit and more vultures.





Alpine accentor

As we drove down we stopped and watched a large herd of Spanish Ibex just below the road, with males approaching the females as they are just entering the mating season.



Spanish Ibex



We had our picnic between oak trees at a picnic spot at the foot of the Peña.

Back at the Laguna del Cristo the fog had gone, and we were able to add Gadwall, Green Sandpiper, Pintail, Spotted redshank, Hoopoe, Lapwing, Buzzard and Meadow pipit to our morning list here.



Pintail and teal



Birds seen day 2:	Mammals:
Thekla's lark Iberian shrike Buzzard Red kite Rock sparrow Mistle thrush Iberian magpie Griffon vulture Crow Kestrel Mallard Shoveler Teal Griffon vulture Robin Linnet Stonechat Chaffinch Iberian shrike Green sandpiper Lapwing Little grebe Cormorant Cirl bunting Serin Great bustard Marsh harrier Black vulture Alpine accentor Crag martin Meadow pipit Gadwall Green Sandpiper Spotted redshank Pintail Hoopoe	Spanish ibex

Day 3 Friday 2nd December:

Sierras de Béjar and Alagon Valley

Another cold and foggy morning greeted us as we drove southwest with our fingers crossed. As we reached the bridge over the Sangusin river at Horcajo de Montemayor, the fog lifted and the birds started to appear. Red kite and Buzzard were the main protagonists in the sky, with a Robin watching over us. Over a wall in a field of cows there were Iberian magpie, House, Spanish and Rock sparrow around the cow feed area with a White wagtail between the cows. We went upriver through groves of Narrow-leaved ash *Fraxinus angustifolia*.



Narrow leaved Ash pasture

Here we saw many Song and Mistle thrush. We came across a herd of grazing cows on either side of the track and kept our distance from the calves, one large-horned cow, perhaps alarmed by our tripods, mooing at us to show us she was in charge, but we passed by without a problem.





Judith saw and heard Great-spotted Woodpecker, and we all saw a Short-toed tree-creeper winding its way up an ash. We stopped to look over a wall towards the mill pond and in a field close by with cows, feeding on the ground were Cirl bunting, Meadow pipit, Wood lark, Magpie, Hoopoe, Wren and Chaffinch. We also saw Blue tit, Coal tit and the ever present Black redstart.

We had a picnic lunch beneath a native Mediterranean Montpellier maple *Acer monspessulanum* and were entertained by large numbers of Griffon vulture and several Black vulture circling around and above us.



After lunch we headed to the village of Pinedas to look at the Church and a large 'lavadero' where the women traditionally washed the laundry, as well as a very long and old drinking trough carved roughly out of granite.



View from village of Pinedas



Granite drinking trough

We drove down the valley for a walk above the Alagon river flanked by Strawberry tree, *Arbutus* Gum cistus, *Cistus ladanifer*, Tree heather and Montpellier maple. There were also quite a few Mediterranean Hackberry trees *Celtis australis*, also known as European nettle tree. Apart from Buzzard and vulture we were surprised at the lack of raptors but there were plenty of passerines, including Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Iberian magpie and Long-tailed tit amongst others.

Thanks Frances and Judith for coming and sharing our wonderful corner of Salamanca with us!

Birds seen day 3:

Red kite
Buzzard
Robin
Magpie
Iberian magpie
House sparrow
Rock sparrow
White wagtail
Song thrush
Mistle thrush
Great-spotted Woodpecker
Short-toed tree-creeper
Cirl bunting
Meadow pipit
Wood lark
Magpie
Hoopoe
Wren
Chaffinch
Blue tit
Coal tit
Black redstart.
Griffon vulture
Black vulture
Blackcap
Longtailed-tit