

TRIP REPORT BOB & BETTY'S MINI TOUR JUNE 6 - 9TH 2022

WITH BIRDING IN SPAIN'S WILD WEST

Monday 6th June Sierra de Quilamas and Batuecas Natural Park

We began the day looking around the grounds of the Hotel Rural Porta Coeli, and the hillside above the hotel. Nightingale, Serin, Cirl bunting and Greenfinch all made an appearance, with the Golden Oriole heard but not seen, and Griffon vulture in the skies. There was Large tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros*, Spanish gatekeeper *Pyronia Bathsheba*, Meadow fritillary *Melitaea parthenoides*, Small copper *Lycaena phlaes*, Bath white *Pontia daplidice*, Clouded yellow *Colias Crocea* and an unidentified Skipper.



Large tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros*



Spanish gatekeeper *Pyronia Bathsheba*





Meadow fritillary *Melitaea parthenoides*



Small copper *Lycaena phlaes*



Bath white *Pontia daplidice*



Clouded yellow *Colias Crocea*



Skipper

Plants included the hairy cistus *Cistus inflatus/psilosepalus*, Round-headed garlic *Allium sphaerocephalon* with a Hairy Yellow-faced bee (actually white!) *Hylaeus hyalinatus*, Gum cistus

Cistus ladanifer, Spanish Marjoram *Thymus mastichina*, Yellow rockrose *Halimium lasianthum*, Musk mallow *Malva moschata*, a Catchfly with a very sleek stripy seedpod *Silene portensis*, Spotted rockrose *Tuberaria Guttata*, Sheep's-bit scabious *Jasione montana*, Spreading bellflower *Campanula patula* and the tiny star-shaped *Filago carpetana*.



Malva moschata



Cistus inflatus



Allium sphaerocephalon with *Hylaeus hyalinatus*



Catchfly *Silene portensis*



Sheeps-bit scabious *Jasione montana*



Spreading bellflower *Campanula patula*



Gum cistus *Cistus ladanifer*



Spanish marjoram *Thymus mastichina*



Filago carpetana



After coffee we drove across to the Portillo mountain pass, stopping off at the view points on the way to the Batuecas river valley. Here there was lots more Yellow rockrose *Halimium lasianthum*, one with a slim green metallic beetle, possibly the Musk beetle *Aromia moschata*, a very green Cucumber spider *Araniella cucurbitina* and a lovely new plant for me: Snowy toadflax *Linaria nivea*.



Yellow rockrose *Halimium lasianthum*



Araniella cucurbitina



Linaria nivea

After a picnic under the shade of a generous cork oak (it was now in the mid 20°C's) we walked first along the path where there was *Anarrhinum bellidifolium*, and along the boardwalk parallel to the river, shaded by a mixture of Cork oak *Quercus suber*, *Arbutus Arbutus unedo*, Narrow-leaved mock privet *Phillyrea angustifolia*, *Laurustinus Viburnum tinus*, and Wild cherry *Prunus avium*.



Anarrhinum bellidifolium

In the valley bottom amongst a variety of ferns, mosses and lichens was a Three bird toadflax *Linaria triornithophora*. Insects included Beautiful demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* flitting around the riverside plants, and the Speckled wood butterfly *Pararge aegeria*. We also spotted an Algerian sand lizard *Psammotrochus algerus*.



Three bird toadflax *Linaria triornithophora*



Beautiful demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* males left and female right



Speckled wood butterfly *Pararge aegeria*



Algerian sand lizard *Psammotrochus algerus*

From here we decided to go and visit the village of La Alberca and have a cool drink in the centre. We noticed some tiny ferns growing out of a wall in the centre of the village.

On our way back to the hotel we stopped for a brief look on some heathland, where there was an Iberian endemic of the legume family *Echinopartum ibericum*, with a flower beetle *Mylabris hieracii*, and in the undergrowth the tiny Ballast toadflax *Linaria spartea*.



flower beetle *Mylabris hieracii*

Ballast toadflax *Linaria spartea*

Tuesday 7th June Peña de Francia and Laguna del Cristo

We had an early morning walk on the hillside filled with birdsong, seeing Robin, Jay, Serin, Nightingale and Red-tumped swallow which are actually nesting at the hotel. We also saw a Goshawk crossing paths with and startling a small flock of Spotless starlings: these suddenly dipped and switched direction as a result. After breakfast we headed straight up to the Peña de Francia, which at 1727m is the second highest mountain in the area. Stopping on the way up at the Paso de Los Lobos we were gifted with a pair of low-flying Black vulture, and as we continued we came across small groups of Spanish Ibex, well camouflaged amongst the rocky slate outcrops and scree.



Black vulture



Spanish ibex on scree slopes.

At the top were Swift, Pallid swift and Crag martin, Black redstart, Linnet, Serin, Northern wheatear, Raven and Dunnock, and we all got good views of Blue rock thrush, adults and chick. I saw Rock bunting but it quickly disappeared behind some rocks, and Alfonso also caught a glimpse of Red rock thrush but it eluded the rest of us. There were great views of Griffon vultures soaring below us from here, and more Spanish Ibex looking like sculptures behind the monastery buildings.



Older male Spanish ibex

We also saw the Cardinal butterfly, and a lizard in the process of shedding its skin - with some bits still attached to its tail -, possibly the Iberian endemic Carbonell lizard.



Carbonell lizard?

We went back down the mountain and after a coffee break drove to a picnic spot in El Maillo. Here we were surrounded by birds as we ate our picnic: Nuthatch, Redstart, Short-toed treecreeper, Jay, White wagtail, Goldfinch, Black redstart, Grey wagtail and Red kite among others.

Then on to a lagoon, the Laguna del Cristo, just north of the Sierra de Francia in the Holm oak dehesa region known as Campo Charro. Here there were no less than 7 pairs of nesting Great-crested grebe, Coot, Gadwall, Mallard, Spoonbill, Great Egret, Grey heron, Little egret and White stork. We were staring for a long time at a brownish raptor feeding on the ground on the far side of the lagoon under the shade of a holm oak: it turned out to be a Short-toed eagle. Then from a different viewpoint we got a closer view of the Spoonbills, and also saw Little plover and a young male Marsh harrier, which appeared to have extremely long legs maybe due to moulting its 'trousers', eating a lizard on the shore. It and a female were later mobbed in flight by a pair of Black-winged stilt which were nesting in the centre of the lagoon.



Marsh harrier

We also saw Red and Black kite, Barn swallow, Woodlark, Woodchat shrike, Rock sparrow and Bluetit.



Wednesday 8th June Arbutus forest, Miranda del Castañar, Pico Cervero

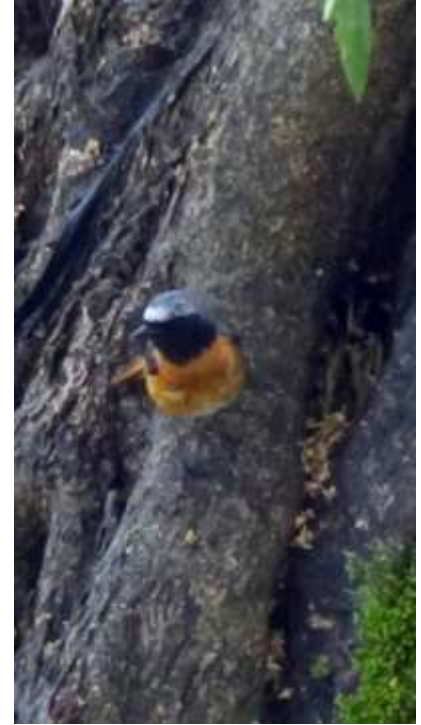
In the morning we had a walk in a very old Strawberry tree, *Arbutus unedo* forest, with Butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus* and Sweet chestnut. Here we saw Golden oriole as well as hearing many small birds. We then visited the medieval walled village of Miranda del Castañar, where we saw Redstart, Black redstart, Swift, Barn swallow, Crag martin and Booted eagle.



Arbutus unedo forest



Miranda del Castañar



Redstart

From here we drove up to the Pico Cervero mountain to the northeast of the Sierra de Francia. Here it was a little windy but we nevertheless saw Black and Griffon vulture, Cirl bunting, Stonechat, Woodlark and heard Melodious warbler singing. We noted many different flowers in the alpine pasture: the tiny delicate Rock thyme *Acinos alpinus* or *Clinopodium alpinus*; Cut-leaved selfheal *Prunella laciniata*; Thyme broomrape *Orobanche alba*; Mediterranean kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria subsp. gandogeri*; Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris* and another Snapdragon, possibly the Iberian endemic *Antirrhinum meoanthum*.



Acinos alpinus





Prunella laciniata



Anthyllis vulneraria subsp. *gandogeri*



Orobanche alba with *Thymus vulgaris*



Polygala vulgaris



Antirrhinum meoanthum?

Battling against the wind were Clouded yellow butterflies *Colias crocea* and a rather worn Chimney sweeper moth *Odezia atrata*.



Colias crocea

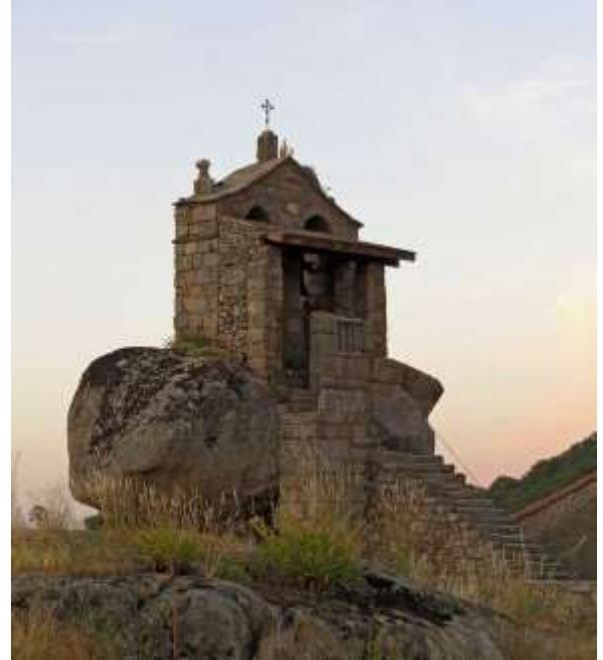


Odezia atrata

Now feeling rather hungry we found a picnic spot in the woods and proceeded on our journey to Salvatierra de Tormes, and the hotel Salvatierra Rural.

Thursday 9th June Neila de San Miguel and Puerto del Tremedal Avila

Our first stop was at Neila de San Miguel, a small village in the foothills of the Sierra de Béjar mountains. It has a peculiar bell tower built onto a large rock and topped with a stork's nest.



Here it was quite hot so we tried to keep to the shade and noticed that the birds were also avoiding being out in the sun. We did however see Swifts, Barn swallow, Crag martin, Rock sparrow, Golden Oriole, Iberian magpie, Melodious warbler, Serin, Western Bonelli's warbler, Bee-eater and Linnet, with the background music of Blackcap and Nightingale. A Hawfinch appeared in the trees above us, and flew onto a branch where we were all able to see its chick awaiting a meal. Raptors included Booted eagle, Red kite and Griffon vulture.



Western Bonelli's warbler peeps from Holm oak



Hawfinch chick waiting for grub

There were meadows full of wildflowers, predominantly *Jasione montana* and *Andryala integrifolia*, which had attracted myriad butterflies, especially Niobe *Argynnis niobe*, Spotted *Melitaea didyma* and Queen of Spain *Issoria lathonia* Fritillaries, and lots of tiny colourful pollinating beetles.



Argynnis niobe



Melitea dydima

There was *Euphorbia oxyphylla* growing from the base of the walls, a pink Campion *Silene scabriflora* native to Iberia and Northwestern Morocco, and Umbrella milkwort *Tolpis Barbata*.



Euphorbia oxyphylla



Silene scabriflora



Tolpis Barbata



We walked amongst centenary chestnut trees planted by the villagers on their wedding day, and saw a young Ocelated lizard *Timon lepidus* by the old stone washing basins, and a Broad-bodied chaser *Libelula depressa*.



Timon Lepidus



Libelula depressa

A bit further on we finally saw what Alfonso and I had secretly hoped for: the 'Duende' or Spoonwing, *Nemoptera bipennis*, only visible at this time of year.



Nemoptera bipennis Photograph Bob Lee

After a picnic in the generous and cool shade of a huge Holm oak, we proceeded up the north eastern flank of the Sierra de Bejar mountain, stopping at a wide expanse of pastureland where we sat in the shade of the car observing Northern wheatears and Water pipit, and listening to a Quail calling. Betty and I had a wander amongst the mountain plants: The endemic genista *Echinospartum lusitanicum* sbsp. *barnadesii*, the endemic mountain knapweed *Centaurea amblensis*, and the Iberian endemic thistles where we photographed the Cardinal butterfly *Argynnis Pandora* on the Iberian endemic Cheesemaker thistle *Carduus carpetanus*.



Centaurea amblensis



Echinospartum lusitanicum sbsp. *Barnadesii*



Argynnis Pandora on *Carduus carpetanus*

There were also Black and Griffon vulture, Skylark, Linnet, Booted eagle, Stonechat and to top the day on our way back down the mountain we saw, perched on a rock by the side of the road, a lovely Ortolan bunting!

Thank you Bob and Betty for coming out with us again!



Ortolan bunting

