

# HEATHERLEA TRIP REPORT

## SPAIN – BIRDS & BUTTERFLIES

WEDNESDAY 17 MAY – TUESDAY 23 MAY  
2023



**Heatherlea Participants:** Deborah Abrehart, Pamela Bradley, David Brassey, John & Ann Burgoine, Shenagh Gilliard, Gerald Gittens, David Murden, Arthur Pitcher, Peter & Liz Robertson, Keith Roylance

**Heatherlea Guides:** Steve West & John Muddeman

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023** – London/Barcelona ; Llobregat Delta (Remolar – Filipinas Reserve)

The group flight from the UK came in on time and thankfully Steve's local knowledge meant he went to meet them at the correct part of the terminal shortly after they came through, unlike me. Whoops! A moderate walk to get to the hire car parking area was a good leg stretch after the flight and the onshore breeze under bright blue skies was welcomed by everyone!

On the edge of the airport area, we parked in shade of some trees and enjoyed a simple picnic lunch, even if it was difficult to even hear much with a couple of groups of young schoolchildren also noisily enjoying their picnics and regular planes passing over! Not to be outdone though, as soon as we could, we headed off for a stroll around part of the reserve and were far from disappointed. Our first was heard Cetti's Warbler yelling from the vegetation, with Common and Great Reed Warblers also heard singing from the depths of the exceptionally tall reed beds. A flighty late migrant female Common Redstart showed that a few birds were still moving through.

After preliminary views of a few birds out over a shallow, sedge-edged lagoon, the shout went up for a fine Collared Pratincole, which then wheeled around on several occasions, disappearing behind vegetation, where wonderfully leggy dapper Black-winged Stilts stalked around or flew low across, so we headed towards a hide for better views. We were then stopped dead in our tracks by a jumbled squeaky song emanating from nearby Tamarisk bushes, where a rare migrant Icterine Warbler was in song!

The hide then not only afforded us great views of the Collared Pratincole perched out on a barer sandy patch, but also of more Stilts; a stunning Little Tern, which came to feed within metres of the hide; a gorgeous full breeding plumage Squacco Heron, which flew in and gave views before sliding off invisibly into cover and also a group of roosting Eurasian Spoonbills, their typical horizontal posture giving away their identity, unlike the upright Little Egrets and Grey Herons nearby. Partial views of the still-singing Icterine were made by many in the group as we started our return to the vehicles, though it remained firmly buried in the back of the bushes, so it was no surprise that a fine male Red-crested Pochard out in the open clearly attracted more attention.

Steve then led the group down to the local beach, where Common and Little Ringed plus Kentish Plovers rubbed shoulders with Common Redshanks, a few Audouin's with Yellow-legged Gulls and, some way offshore, Balearic Shearwaters banked in the distance with the odd Northern Gannet.

After this magnificent start, we were ready for the next step of our journey, working our way out of the edge of Barcelona, west and then up towards our hotel for the next three nights near the French border. Winding through some spectacular landscapes we even noted a few birds in passing, including a small group of Griffon Vultures from the second bus, a Common Raven, a Carrion Crow, a couple of Common Kestrels and, close to the hotel, a Corn Bunting or two clinging to bushes in the strong wind. Even during call-over single White and Iberian Yellow Wagtails were noted outside, with a couple

more of the latter noted afterwards as we headed out for an ENORMOUS tapas dinner in the nearby town, where Common House Martins and a couple of Common Swifts finished off the day's birdwatching!

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May** – Fontanals, Coll de la Ceueta, Castellar de N'Hug.

Following reports from early risers that there was a remarkable number of small birds in the golf course and gardens of the Fontanals complex, despite a moderate to stiff chilly breeze after breakfast, we took a gentle walk down to the local river and back.

After passing the village with its abundant chipping Eurasian Tree and a single shreeping Rock Sparrow, tail-quivering Black Redstarts and European Serins jingling from the trees, we entered a small park and found that the pre-breakfast reports were all true and there had clearly been a migration 'fall'! Spotted and European Pied Flycatchers seemed to be in every third tree or bush, with a couple of female Common Redstarts also still on migration, Common Nightingales either sang or gurred from deep in the bushes by a stream, where our first Common Reed and Melodious Warblers also sang and or crept among the foliage. The first of several Garden Warblers bubbled from the bushes too providing an excellent comparison to the plentiful Eurasian Blackcaps giving their, first, rougher and then, latterly, sweeter songs. Two male Common Sandpipers in a small stream also put on a noisy demonstration of "this is my stretch of water", with a female watching the proceedings in the middle!

The wind was still cold, especially with the sun now having gone behind cloud, so heading more into the lee of the trees was welcomed, with our first Common Nightingale, plus rattling Western Bonelli's, a furtive Willow and non-melodic Melodious Warblers seen, though a rather coy Iberian Green Woodpecker preened from among some small trees while keeping a wary eye on us!

The hawthorns were in full flower, making a fine sight, with a couple of dark violet splashes in the woodland shade were provided by a few clumps of the strange parasitic but lovely Purple Toothwort in full flower. A couple of Eurasian Golden Orioles added a decidedly tropical air to the wonderfully noisy soundscape!

We finally returned, marvelling again at the amazing numbers of flycatchers of both species, adding a Great Spotted Woodpecker and Eurasian Nuthatch to the already impressive tally, though with a few openings now in the cloud, a few raptors were on the move, and in a short space of time we enjoyed passing Griffon Vulture, Black and Red Kites, Short-toed Snake and Booted Eagles in addition to the local Common Buzzards. Fantastic!

After a quick stop and a few minutes to watch a very dark Red Squirrel on the golf course, we were off again, this time to explore part of the high-altitude pine forest and grazing areas above the treeline to the east. We climbed up a winding road through dense, mature pine forest, stopping on the roadside where there was much more of a view including some clearings and stepped out for a while. At first very little seemed to

be present, even if a Common Cuckoo (heard at virtually every stop during the day!) and some local Coal Tits were singing loudly to belie their unseen presence. A Common Crossbill or two were heard, but it was the stunning silhouette of a Bearded Vulture which really caught our attention as it glided serenely across above us before turning effortlessly away and easing out of sight over the hilltop. Wow! Even the flock of around 50 Red-billed Choughs wafting round the meadows at the top of the mountain behind us didn't invoke as much of an impression!

We were just about to leave when the subtle tinkling calls of a Citril Finch brought us back to our senses and we then watched for perhaps half an hour as ones and twos flew back and forth over and past us, occasionally landing in sight or the males popping out to sing on exposed branches, seemingly always for just too short a time for everyone to see them well in the scopes! A different Bearded Vulture drifted just as serenely back in the opposite direction just to keep us on our toes!

Being out of the wind here we made the executive decision to simply eat our packed lunches right here, which again was enlivened by the local European Serins and Citril Finches, plus a small group of Common Crossbills at the end, including a couple of stripey juveniles.

We still needed to go higher, so took the tortuous route to and past the Col de la Creueta, stopping sporadically to look for birds or anything else of interest as we went. Broken by a stop in the lovely town of Castellar de N'Hug, we picked up our first examples of several birds. Northern Wheatears, here of a very strikingly pale race, were widespread, with a few (Iberian) Dunnocks, Common Stonechats and even a lovely Common Cuckoo seen, but there were two "purple patches", first for a couple of Griffon Vultures which came down beside a few Common Ravens to eat the remains of an Alpine Marmot which had first been picked over by a Bearded Vulture, in addition to several lovely LIVE Marmots as well! Secondly, we overshot on our return to look for a Ring Ouzel which had briefly been seen by the second bus earlier, only to find a stunning orange-bellied, blue-headed, black-winged and white-backed Common Rock Thrush male, which delighted as it flew from perch to perch, and also led us to find our first pair of Red-backed Shrikes in nearby bushes!

We finally called it a day, having birded between just 3°C and 10°C all day, but had recorded almost 80 species in the process!

Our second evening meal out in Puigcerdà was slightly different from the first, but still just as memorable and voluminous as the first!

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> May** – Fontanals, Urús, Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park, inc. Coll de Pal

A fresh dusting of snow on the nearby mountains showed how the weather was clamping down a little, but it was a beautiful sunny and almost still start to the day, and strong contrast to the cloudy and windy evening before.

Few flycatchers were apparent compared to the day before but given the fine conditions we took another short walk first, again down by the river, this time being taken aback by the remarkable numbers of Common Reed and Garden Warblers which had dropped overnight, with birds seemingly in every other bush! A few Greater Whitethroats, Red-backed Shrikes and Corn Buntings put in an appearance, with a pair of Yellowhammers, a colourful addition to the list. A reeling Common Grasshopper Warbler was again testament to the fall conditions, and we speculated as to whether these birds could detect the bad weather scudding across Southern France at the time, just to the North and consequently stopped short to feed up. Two Roe Deer in their rufous summer coats running across close in front were a fine addition to the mammal list!

We headed off towards the mainly limestone massif of the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park, but Steve stopped at a random spot which looked good for Ortolan Bunting. With the cloud breaking somewhat and the temperature having crept up to 11°C, we also crossed our fingers for a few butterflies on the box scrub and thyme-covered, flower-rich hillsides...

No sooner had we stepped out of the vehicles than we heard the first of two Ortolan Buntings singing up a slope off to one side, then a “cheese-less” close male Cirl Bunting rattling away and then a fine pair of dapper Rock Buntings flew over, with the male dropping down in view! It was a bit of a challenge to know where to look first, especially as a stunning pair of Red-backed Shrikes were also in some nearby bushes where a male Western Orphean Warbler was singing loudly from underneath!

It seemed sacrilegious to walk across the rocky ground, profusely studded with patches of brilliant blue of flax, speedwell and innumerable grape hyacinths, plus pink-flowered thymes and Mountain Kidney-vetch, but it also finally produced our first butterflies, with a very worn Bath White and Southern Grizzled Skipper, with another larger skipper giving us the slip unlike a delightful Green Hairstreak. A Woodlark sang sublimely overhead as we continued our search to try and see the singing Ortolans, one of which finally gave scope views, though when the sun came through properly, we also recorded our first Berger’s Clouded Yellow dashing past, then in quick succession, superb freshly emerged male Adonis and Baton Blues!

The weather tried to close in as we made our way into and up the Cadí-Moixeró park road, and it was even sleeting as we reached our first main destination! With a stiff 2°C wind blowing, there was little enthusiasm for getting out, so we decided to continue on and up... The swirling flurries of snow at the start suddenly eased, just as we passed the treeline and despite a cold wind, the snow shower passed on and we were left with views over extensive tightly-grazed alpine pastures, with barely a bird or animal in sight! Not to be outdone however, we continued on further, passing a small group of Red-billed Choughs, with a much larger group of Alpine Choughs ahead providing a real treat as a few of them circled and whirled overhead before dropping down to feed on the slopes below us.

Looking for a good turning point ahead proved to be a good move, with a few in the front bus spotting a feeding Ring Ouzel on the slopes, though this quickly gave the rest of us the slip, though with some persistence, we also found a couple of flighty Water Pipits, and plenty more dapper Northern Wheatears. The return was punctuated by a fine group of Southern Chamois on the side of a steep gully.

Our picnic lunch was taken outside in the lee (mostly!) of a large building with picnic tables outside! Despite the cold, a fine Crested Tit in the tree beside us showed well to suggest we were doing the right thing, while a flock of Citril Finches on the other side provided a little choral embellishment from time to time, despite the occasional raucous whistling of Marmot or two!

The weather improved further, the sun came out for longer and we celebrated by taking a good walk along a gently inclined track towards the head of a stunningly scenic valley. Although the birds were rather limited, a few Firecrests, Citril Finches, Mistle Thrushes and calling Common Crossbills for the backmarkers were noted, even if it was the numerous flowers that really brightened up our path, including wild strawberries and both cow- and ox-lips amongst the more familiar.

The drive down was punctuated by a well-earned and much appreciated drinks and comfort stop, though we also spent a good while at some wonderful flower-rich arable fields close to the hotel. A Common Quail called a couple of times and a fine group of Whinchats were present when we arrived, but very rapidly disappeared, leaving just a couple for the majority of the group to enjoy. Not to worry though with a fantastic floral display including Common Poppy, Cornflower, Weld, *Lepidium draba*, Fine-leaved Tansy-mustard and Sainfoin of most note, but amongst many others. Western Marsh Harrier, Griffon Vulture, Black and Red Kites, Common Buzzards and Eurasian Kestrel were also enjoyed, along with the numerous Eurasian Tree Sparrows and Corn Buntings!

The weather, with black and ominous cloud over France started heading towards us, so we boarded and headed back to the hotel, not without enjoying single Spotted and Pied Flycatchers and a female Common Redstart feeding on the golf course beside us as we went!

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May** – Transfer Fontanals to Lleida via Alinyà road, Salgar Gorge & Rufeà marshes

With fewer going out for an early stroll, despite quite clear conditions again, a little less was reported over breakfast than previous mornings, though most of the usual culprits were still present. A fine Whinchat as we pulled out of the hotel grounds was a great start to our day for all however!

We dropped down from the greener and colder higher regions near Puigcerdá into the hotter lower valleys with a more Mediterranean climate, where the sun was just warming up the open grassland patches enough to entice a few butterflies out, though

we first looked for a few birds. Red-rumped Swallows, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Northern Goshawk at one spot, plus the local race of Long-tailed Tit.

The butterflies were a treat, with one spot with open grass and a small river crossing producing Long-tailed Blues, Berger's Clouded yellows, a few grizzled skipper types, Southern Brown Argus, a presumed Osiris Blue, Iberian Scarce Swallowtail, a superb Sooty Orange-tip, a fly-by Wood White sp., brief Spanish Festoon, but perhaps best of all, a stunning fresh Spanish Fritillary giving excellent views. We had also started off with a couple of gorgeous owl-flies, a predatory dragonfly-like neuropteran with brilliant yellow and jet-black patterns in the wings.

Lunch was taken near the Salgar Gorge, where only a few butterflies were moving in the heat, though a Tiger Moth put in a brief appearance. Birds were more to the fore here though, with a pair of adult Bonelli's Eagles putting in a couple of brief appearances, with a few Alpine Swifts wheeling nearby, and a fine male Western Subalpine Warbler finally sang from an exposed perch after giving us a little bit of a run-around! Our first European Turtle Dove was also heard purring from nearby by a few of the party.

A walk in the gorge itself didn't produce any better views of the Bonelli's Eagles as hoped, perhaps in part given a good thunderstorm passing close by, but the butterflies were excellent in the wooded area here, including freshly emerged Commas and Southern White Admirals, which gave everyone superb views. The colourful male Provence Orange-tips dashing past on a few occasions were a fine sight too!

The Rufeá marshes just outside Lleida, walked in the later afternoon despite very warm and humid conditions, are rich in species, but particularly for wetland birds as the habitat in its name suggests! Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Penduline-tit, Eurasian Golden Oriole, large heronry with breeding Cattle and Little Egrets, Grey and Black-crowned Night Herons, Common Kingfisher, Little Grebe, two Purple Herons flying off, Great Reed Warbler and a large kettle of Black Kites.

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May** – Anglesole area, Bellmunt area, Mas de Melons and Cogul area.

After a 6.30am breakfast we were away just over 45 minutes later in order to beat the predicted heat and get out onto the agricultural areas early for the best bird activity. And it worked!

Turning off the main road we were instantly stopped by three Eurasian Stone-curlews in the adjacent field kicking up a fuss, seemingly given an interloper among them and giving us wonderful sights and sounds in the process.

It seemed rather quiet, with just a few Eurasian Jackdaws at first, but suddenly the rhythmic whistling sound of a flying male Little Bustard caught our ears and one whirred right over us before pitching into the tall 'weeds' of a nearby fallow field! Trying to see this revealed a further four more flying nearby around in a tight group,

this actually being a female harassed by up to three males at any time, just as male ducks chase females later in the breeding season. The cool, still conditions meant that we could readily hear first one and then a couple more of these now rather rare birds, plus allowing us to watch them in the scopes in the process.

A few more were added to the tally as we continued on but we also spent considerable time, as we wound our way through the patchwork of arable fields, watching other birds, including two very white Short-toed Snake Eagles, a distant male Red-footed Falcon, at least three Eurasian Hobbies, over half a dozen European Rollers, ...

Eventually dragging ourselves off we headed to another huge area of arable fields, this time with small scrub patches and more small hills, not ignoring a Rock Sparrow calling from a roadside post in the village nor a very flighty Little Owl on the roof of a tumbledown building. The birds seemed very few and far between at the start, despite a fly-by male Little Bustard, but the birding just kept improving with the first of three Great Spotted Cuckoos appearing close to the track, then after we were out to take a look, three European Honey-buzzards on active migration passed over with a fine (late) also migrating Osprey in tow! Two more honeys a little later added to the raptor variety, plus single Short-toed Snake Eagle, plenty of kestrels, our first Booted Eagle of the day, several Black and a single Red Kite and then, as the cloud pulled away and the sun started to warm things properly, the first of a few Griffon Vultures went past.

Two further pairs of Great Spotted Cuckoos were holding a noisy territorial dispute further on, giving us excellent views, even though the first minibus had actually stopped for a pair of Iberian Grey Shrikes! European Bee-eater numbers began to increase, while in a hot scrubby hollow amongst pines, a Cirl Bunting sang and a few mature male damselflies, including Common Bluet and Dainty Damselflies were also noted flying around, despite there not being water anywhere for miles around, apparently...

A comfort and drink's break enabled John to go and buy today's tasty picnic lunch in a nearby town, which we then ate at some picnic tables to the south of the city, with "luncheon vultures" for accompaniment...

The remainder of the afternoon was taken up driving along a few small roads down narrow rocky-sided dry stream valleys. Almost immediately we stopped for a fine pair of Red-rumped Swallows prospecting under a huge overhang, then a little further two Blue Rock Thrushes entertained us for a while, the male looking stunning when catching the sunlight. It was very warm and rather still, plus a little bit sultry, so it was no surprise that not many birds were moving around, but a stunning black-throated Western Black-eared Wheatear flew across between the vans and perched just beside the second bus, even if it didn't last long enough to take photos! Indeed, it was the first of three, though only one was for the first minibus!

Steve kept persisting and sure enough, in one particularly rocky area, a dapper Black Wheatear crowned a rock, then over 15 minutes or so moved across the hillside,



showing variably well, despite being surprisingly difficult to find at times given its sun/shade camouflage on the starkly bare outcrops.

Having had an early start, we now called it a day early too, coming back for a relaxing later afternoon, some taking the siesta approach to relax even more deeply (Ha ha!), before we met again for the species lists and then dinner slightly earlier at 7.30pm.

### **Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May** – Alfès area, Mas de Melons area & Rufeà marshes

The dead still and overcast conditions, even with a few small drops of rain for the first hour or so were excellent to birdwatch. Winding our way out to the Alfès area we first stopped at some fields which are also managed with wildlife in mind and were immediately assailed by the sound of several Calandra Larks cruising high overhead blasting out their lovely, mimicry-filled songs. A calling Little Owl was very much more discrete, not wanting to be seen, but a fine Montagu's Harrier, elegantly hunting the back of the nearest field was simply great to watch as we listened, then again, a little later, as it made some aggressive passes at its mate which had presumably come off the nest for a wing and leg stretch!

Another stop on the road further ahead held another delightful surprise, when an adult Eurasian Eagle-owl could be seen peering out from its daytime roost across the valley! Having just missed seeing a couple of chicks the day before, since they'd grown large enough to become mobile, it was a huge bonus! A male Blue Rock Thrush nearby became merely further entertainment in the face of this monster!

Continuing, Steve's intricate knowledge of the area again paid dividends as we headed off down yet another dirt track into the depths of the Catalanian 'steppes' and ended up beside a few uncultivated arable fields and low scrub. Immediately, a small flock of calling Pin-tailed Sandgrouse could be seen circling low over a field, but dropped down and disappeared before we were even all out of the vehicles! Not to worry though, since they, or another group, appeared shortly afterwards and after wheeling around, a pair dropped into the back of our field, giving excellent views as they almost scurried through the rather sparse stubble in the still quite early morning light, allowing us plenty of time to enjoy them in the scopes. A couple of buzzing Mediterranean Short-toed Larks flew quickly almost overhead before plunging down into an area of thyme scrub behind us, with one returning just as furtively afterwards, though many in the group were simply unable to see them. Standing close to this area of thyme, in a strictly controlled area with no access failed to produce more sightings, though a Greater Short-toed Lark called as it came over and dropped down between the little bushes to also disappear from sight.

The bottom of a small valley nearby required some careful driving to reach, but before we could even park to take our planned stroll, the silhouette of an adult Eurasian Eagle-owl dominated the skyline, being quite remarkable as it was out, and relaxed in broad daylight! We watched it at length until it flew off along the valley side and disappeared

from view. WOW! As if this wasn't enough, a pair of superb Western Black-eared Wheatears were flitting around some bushes in form and a gorgeous Little Owl, seemingly very content that we were present and the Eagle Owl had gone, sat out in full view at close range for all to admire! We started the short walk, only to note that the cliff-dwelling pigeons here were not feral pigeons (or even wild-type Rock Doves) but were all Stock Doves!

A Mediterranean Short-toed Lark appeared in song flight just over the lip of the valley, though only gave a few phrases before dropping out of sight. However, the Eagle Owl reappeared, flying right across the valley and then again as it flew along the far hillside before finally pitching into a pine, remaining partially visible as it was mobbed by a pair of cheeky Eurasian Magpies, even lunging at the latter with its beak on a couple of occasions when they strayed just too close!

Driving out along the valley was similarly rewarding, with another Little Owl, a European Roller or two, a Eurasian Hoopoe, a circling Short-toed Snake Eagle, several European Bee-eaters and even a few stragglers of a much larger group of Red-billed Choughs which had come past us earlier.

It was still only mid-morning, so we embarked on another quite long drive over a series of tracks and old roads to explore the area further. While at times it really felt a bit quiet, especially given the very dry dusty conditions, the birds kept on coming and what quality! A European Turtle Dove purred from a wire, a sign of hope now that their hunting has been banned across the EU, another group of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse wheeled around calling noisily before dropping (though just out of sight of course!), into a nearby field, a few European Bee-eaters and Eurasian Hoopoes were present as we passed and then at a most unlikely site beside a couple of fallow fields, a whole host of birds were present. A male Greater Short-toed Lark sang high up in its nearly circular song flight, fluttering up and then parachuting down on extended wings, though another on the ground just moments after didn't require a scope to watch! Around 50 Black Kites feeding among and over the already harvested grain stubble were a terrific sight, but a few falcons hawking low over the uncut cereals were a Eurasian Hobby with two female Red-footed Falcons! Even though these disappeared quite quickly, one of the Red-foots gave us a superb fly-past and circle-over, the space they left then being replaced by two gorgeous male Lesser Kestrels, which hovered over and over again in front in their search for prey, giving us tremendous views! An Egyptian Vulture cruised over with the first of a flotilla of Griffons and then, to our delight, a rather high Cinereous Vulture also drifted over, this only being Steve's second ever on his local patch!

It was still only around noon, but with rain showers forecast in the afternoon and black clouds and rain already apparently over the low mountain area we'd planned to visit in the afternoon, we switched plans again and headed back to the Rufeia marshes, taking our picnic lunches early before enjoying a long, but very gentle stroll.

Lots of Common Swifts were still hawking overhead, including a few of their much larger Alpine cousins, while the local Barn Swallows included at least five fledged juveniles, their prominent yellow gapes still visible. All the usual suspects were present as on the previous visit, but more importantly, David found the still-unfinished nest of a Eurasian Penduline-tit high up in a White Poplar (quite a feat in itself!), allowing us all to enjoy the comings and goings of this gorgeous little sprite of a bird as it brought in nesting material to weave into its fluffy hanging sack. Melodious, Common Reed and Great Reed Warblers also sang from their respective trees or reeds, with the latter being much more obliging this time, the heronry was still very much alive, but fledgling, Black-crowned Night Herons and nearly fledged Cattle Egrets entertained this time. We even finally managed to get Gerald onto a kingfisher... Hooray!

While any new woodpeckers failed to show up, a few looks at the isolated pool turned up double trumps from some. First, a fine male Little Bittern flew across the back, though we had to watch and wait nearly half an hour before it was suddenly spotted again tucked deep in the bulrushes and then a further nail-biting 15 minutes before it was found again a few metres away to the left and could be enjoyed by all! A young Water Rail, still with short beak was also found in an open area of mud on the edge and dashed out in front of a small group who had been lucky in a right time, right place situation!

We finally pulled ourselves away, especially as the thankfully now slightly cooler and breezier conditions following a very warm and muggy hour or two signalled the likelihood of a little rain, and as Steve headed past a small pool stopped to admire a super Squacco Heron balancing on the perimeter fence! I thought he'd stopped for the Sand Martins hawking over the pool, but we took them in while passing as a bonus!

## **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May** – Transfer Lleida to Barcelona and flights / transport home

Giving ourselves two hours to get to the airport we were spot on time, having foreseen a little rush-hour traffic entering Barcelona. At least a couple of Monk Parakeets and a large female Peregrine Falcon overhead for the second vehicle alleviated the occasional stops!

We said our farewells to the group outside the terminal as they headed off to catch their flight home, rounding off an excellent tour!

This birds and butterflies' trip, held over since 2020, was clearly finally biased towards birds for two reasons. Firstly, despite the exceptionally warm and dry late winter and spring up until c. 10 days before the tour commenced, with unusually high numbers of butterflies until this point, it had turned unseasonably cold almost throughout and especially in the higher areas with snow on higher ground, meaning that only in one or two very sheltered areas was there any activity. Secondly, the severe drought in the entire region and especially in the middle and lower areas, meant that there was a

dearth of butterflies on the wing lower down, despite some warmer weather during the second part of our stay there.

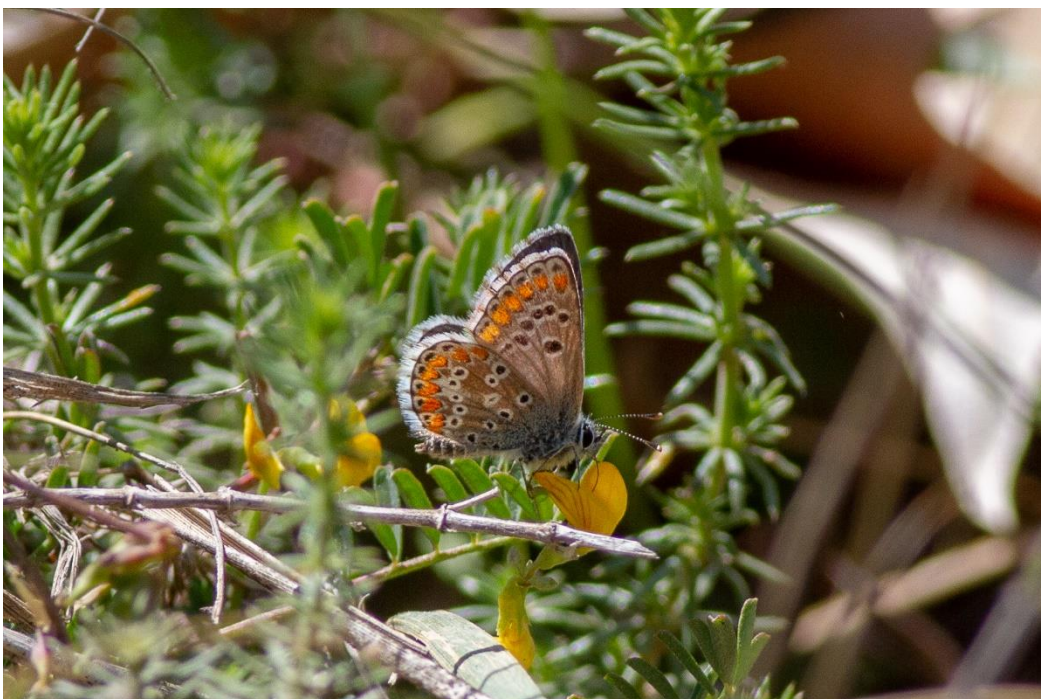
So, the final tally of 167 bird species recorded is an excellent total for just 5 ½ days actual birdwatching, especially considering the quality of many of these species and their sightings, from Bearded Vultures, Alpine Choughs, Citril Finches and Common Rock Thrush in the higher mountains, Western Orphean Warbler, Ortolan, Cirl and Rock Buntings plus Red-backed Shrikes in the middle hills, through Little Bustards, Great Spotted Cuckoos and Red-footed Falcons on the steppes, plus not forgetting the coastal wetland species including Red-crested Pochard, Squacco Heron, Collared Pratincole and even a vagrant Icterine Warbler!

The 36 species of butterfly included gems such as Iberian Scarce swallowtail, Spanish festoon, Provence and Sooty Orange-tips, Cleopatra, De Prunner's Ringlet, Southern White Admiral, False Ilex and Blue-spot Hairstreaks, Baton Blue, Southern Brown Argus and the gorgeous Spanish Fritillary. With Southern Chamois, Alpine Marmot, Catalonian Owlfly (OK, I've made the name up, but its world distribution is centred on Catalonia!), Horned Praying Mantis, Spotted Sulphur and both Large and Edward's Psammodromus to boot, along with numerous other species from different groups, it was a very rich wildlife experience!

If you enjoyed John and Steve's trip, [click here](#) to find out the next holidays that John will be leading and [click here](#) for Steve.

To contact Heatherlea to discuss this, or any other Heatherlea holiday call us on 01479 821248 or email [info@heatherlea.co.uk](mailto:info@heatherlea.co.uk)

To plan your next Heatherlea holiday [click here](#) to see our Holiday Planner.



Species lists

#	BIRDS SPECIES NAME	17/05	18/05	19/05	20/05	21/05	22/05	23/05
1	Greylag Goose	✓						
2	Common Shelduck	✓						
3	Mallard	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Red-crested Pochard	✓						
5	Common Pheasant <i>Int.</i>			✓				
6	Common Quail			✓				
7	Red-legged Partridge					✓	✓	
8	Alpine Swift	✓			✓	✓	✓	
9	Common Swift	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Little Bustard					✓		
11	Great Spotted Cuckoo					✓	✓	
12	Common Cuckoo		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse						✓	
14	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Stock Dove					✓	✓	
16	Common Wood Pigeon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	European Turtle Dove				✓	✓	✓	
18	Eurasian Collared Dove		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Water Rail						✓	
20	Common Moorhen				✓		✓	
21	Eurasian Coot	✓						
22	Little Grebe				✓		✓	
23	Great Crested Grebe	✓						
24	Greater Flamingo	✓						
25	Eurasian Stone-curlew					✓	✓	✓
26	Black-winged Stilt	✓						
27	Common Ringed Plover	✓						
28	Little Ringed Plover	✓						
29	Kentish Plover	✓						
30	Common Sandpiper		✓	✓	✓			
31	Common Redshank	✓						
32	Collared Pratincole	✓						
33	Audouin's Gull	✓						
34	Yellow-legged Gull	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
35	Little Tern	✓						
36	Balearic Shearwater	✓						
37	White Stork				✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Northern Gannet	✓						
39	Great Cormorant				✓		✓	
40	Eurasian Spoonbill	✓						
41	Little Bittern						✓	
42	Black-crowned Night Heron				✓		✓	
43	Squacco Heron	✓					✓	
44	Western Cattle Egret				✓	✓	✓	
45	Grey Heron	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Purple Heron	✓			✓			
47	Great Egret	✓						

#	SPECIES NAME	17/05	18/05	19/05	20/05	21/05	22/05	23/05
48	Little Egret	✓		✓	✓		✓	
49	Osprey					✓		
50	Bearded Vulture		✓					
51	Egyptian Vulture		✓				✓	
52	European Honey-buzzard		✓			✓	✓	
53	Griffon Vulture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
54	Cinereous Vulture						✓	
55	Short-toed Snake Eagle		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
56	Booted Eagle		✓	✓		✓		
57	Bonelli's Eagle				✓		✓	
58	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	✓	✓		✓	✓		
59	Northern Goshawk				✓			
60	Western Marsh Harrier		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
61	Montagu's Harrier				✓	✓	✓	
62	Red Kite	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
63	Black Kite		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
64	Common Buzzard		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Little Owl					✓	✓	
66	Eurasian Eagle-owl						✓	
67	Eurasian Hoopoe	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
68	European Roller					✓	✓	
69	Common Kingfisher				✓		✓	
70	European Bee-eater	✓			✓	✓	✓	
71	Great Spotted Woodpecker		✓	✓				
72	Iberian Green Woodpecker		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
73	Lesser Kestrel						✓	
74	Common Kestrel	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	Red-footed Falcon					✓	✓	
76	Eurasian Hobby					✓	✓	
77	Peregrine Falcon					✓		✓
78	Monk Parakeet	✓						✓
79	Red-backed Shrike		✓	✓				
80	Iberian Grey Shrike					✓	✓	
81	Woodchat Shrike					✓	✓	
82	Eurasian Golden Oriole		✓		✓	✓	✓	
83	Eurasian Jay		✓	✓	✓			
84	Eurasian Magpie	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Red-billed Chough		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	Alpine Chough			✓				
87	Western Jackdaw				✓	✓	✓	
88	Carrion Crow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
89	Northern Raven	✓	✓	✓		✓		
90	Coal Tit		✓	✓				
91	Crested Tit			✓				
92	Eurasian Blue Tit		✓	✓	✓		✓	
93	Great Tit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
94	Eurasian Penduline Tit				✓		✓	
95	Woodlark		✓	✓			✓	
96	Eurasian Skylark		✓	✓	✓			

#	SPECIES NAME	17/05	18/05	19/05	20/05	21/05	22/05	23/05
97	Thekla's Lark					✓	✓	
98	Crested Lark				✓	✓	✓	
99	Greater Short-toed Lark						✓	
100	Calandra Lark						✓	
101	Mediterranean Short-toed Lark						✓	
102	Sand Martin				✓		✓	
103	Eurasian Crag Martin	✓	✓	✓	✓			
104	Barn Swallow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Common House Martin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Red-rumped Swallow				✓	✓	✓	
107	Cetti's Warbler	✓		✓	✓		✓	
108	Long-tailed Tit		✓		✓			
109	Western Bonelli's Warbler	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
110	Willow Warbler		✓					
111	Common Chiffchaff			✓				
112	Great Reed Warbler	✓			✓		✓	
113	Common Reed Warbler	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
114	Melodious Warbler		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
115	Icterine Warbler	✓						
116	Common Grasshopper Warbler			✓				
117	Zitting Cisticola	✓						
118	Eurasian Blackcap		✓	✓	✓		✓	
119	Garden Warbler		✓	✓				
120	Western Orphean Warbler			✓				
121	Sardinian Warbler	✓				✓	✓	
122	Western Subalpine Warbler				✓	✓	✓	
123	Common Whitethroat		✓	✓				
124	Common Firecrest			✓	✓			
125	Eurasian Wren		✓	✓	✓			
126	Eurasian Nuthatch		✓	✓				
127	Short-toed Treecreeper		✓	✓				
128	Common Starling	✓	✓	✓		✓		
129	Spotless Starling	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
130	Song Thrush		✓	✓	✓			
131	Mistle Thrush		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
132	Common Blackbird	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
133	Ring Ouzel		✓	✓				
134	Spotted Flycatcher	✓	✓	✓	✓			
135	European Robin		✓	✓	✓		✓	
136	Common Nightingale		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
137	European Pied Flycatcher		✓	✓	✓			
138	Black Redstart	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
139	Common Redstart	✓	✓	✓	✓			
140	Common Rock Thrush		✓					
141	Blue Rock Thrush					✓	✓	
142	Whinchat			✓	✓	✓		
143	European Stonechat		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
144	Northern Wheatear		✓	✓				
145	Western Black-eared Wheatear					✓	✓	

#	SPECIES NAME	17/05	18/05	19/05	20/05	21/05	22/05	23/05
146	Black Wheatear					✓		
147	Rock Sparrow		✓	✓	✓	✓		
148	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
149	House Sparrow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
150	Dunnock		✓	✓				
151	Iberian Yellow Wagtail	✓	✓	✓	✓			
152	Grey Wagtail		✓	✓				
153	White Wagtail	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
154	Tawny Pipit		✓					
155	Water Pipit			✓				
156	Common Chaffinch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
157	European Greenfinch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
158	Common Linnet		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
159	Red Crossbill		✓	✓				
160	European Goldfinch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
161	Citril Finch		✓	✓				
162	European Serin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
163	Corn Bunting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
164	Yellowhammer			✓				
165	Rock Bunting			✓				
166	Ortolan Bunting			✓				
167	Cirl Bunting			✓		✓	✓	

#	BUTTERFLIES	17/05	18/05	19/05	20/05	21/05	22/05	23/05
1	Mallow Skipper ( <i>Carcharodus alceae</i> )				✓	✓	✓	
2	Southern Grizzled Skipper ( <i>Pyrgus malvoides</i> )			✓	✓			
3	Iberian Scarce Swallowtail ( <i>Iphiclides feisthamelii</i> )				✓			
4	Spanish Festoon ( <i>Zerynthia rumina</i> )				✓			
5	Wood White sp. ( <i>Leptidea sinapis/reali</i> )				✓			
6	Black-veined White ( <i>Aporia crataegi</i> )			✓	✓			
7	Small White ( <i>Pieris rapae</i> )	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Large White ( <i>Pieris brassicae</i> )	✓						
9	Western Dappled White ( <i>Euchloe crameri</i> )					✓		
10	Orange-tip ( <i>Anthocharis cardamines</i> )			✓	✓			
11	Provence Orange-tip ( <i>Anthocharis euphenoides</i> )				✓			
12	Bath White ( <i>Pontia daplidice</i> )			✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Sooty Orange-tip ( <i>Zegris eupheme</i> )				✓			
14	Clouded Yellow ( <i>Colias croceus</i> )				✓			
15	Berger's Clouded Yellow ( <i>Colias alfacariensis</i> )			✓	✓			
16	Cleopatra ( <i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i> )				✓			



#	SPECIES NAME	17/05	18/05	19/05	20/05	21/05	22/05	23/05
17	Green Hairstreak ( <i>Callophrys rubi</i> )			✓				
18	False Ilex Hairstreak ( <i>Satyrion esculi</i> )				✓			
19	Blue-spot Hairstreak ( <i>Satyrion spini</i> )					✓		
20	Small Copper ( <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i> )				✓			
21	Long-tailed Blue ( <i>Lampides boeticus</i> )				✓			
22	Osiris Blue ( <i>Cupido osiris</i> )				✓			
23	Holly Blue ( <i>Celastrina argiolus</i> )	✓			✓	✓		
24	Baton Blue ( <i>Scolitantides (Pseudophilotes) baton</i> )			✓				
25	Southern Brown Argus ( <i>Plebejus (Aricia) cramer</i> )				✓			
26	Common Blue ( <i>Polyommatus icarus</i> )			✓	✓			
27	Adonis Blue ( <i>Polyommatus bellargus</i> )			✓				
28	Speckled Wood ( <i>Pararge aegeria</i> )	✓			✓		✓	
29	Wall Brown ( <i>Lasiommata megera</i> )				✓			
30	Small Heath ( <i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i> )			✓				
31	Meadow Brown ( <i>Maniola jurtina</i> )	✓						
32	De Prunner's Ringlet ( <i>Erebia triaria</i> )			✓				
33	Southern White Admiral ( <i>Limenitis reducta</i> )				✓			
34	Painted Lady ( <i>Vanessa cardui</i> )			✓				
35	Comma ( <i>Polygonia c-album</i> )				✓			
36	Spanish Fritillary ( <i>Euphydryas desfontainii</i> )				✓			
	<b>MAMMALS &amp; OTHER WILDLIFE</b>							
1	Red Squirrel ( <i>Sciurus vulgaris</i> )		✓					
2	European Rabbit ( <i>Oryctalegus cuniculus</i> )		✓			✓	✓	
3	Southern Chamois ( <i>Rupicapra pyrenaica</i> )			✓				
4	Alpine Marmot ( <i>Marmota marmota</i> )		✓	✓				
5	Red Deer ( <i>Cervus elaphus</i> )		✓					
6	Roe Deer ( <i>Capreolus capreolus</i> )			✓				
7	Large Psammodromus ( <i>Psammodromus algirus</i> )					✓		
8	Edward's Psammodromus ( <i>Psammodromus edwardsii</i> )						✓	
9	Hummingbird Hawk-moth ( <i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i> )			✓	✓			
10	Spotted Sulphur ( <i>Emmelia trabealis</i> )			✓				
11	Small noctuid sp. ( <i>Cleonymia yvanii</i> )			✓				
12	Feathered Footman ( <i>Coscinia striata</i> )				✓			
13	Yellow Shell ( <i>Camptogramma bilineata</i> )					✓		

#	SPECIES NAME	17/05	18/05	19/05	20/05	21/05	22/05	23/05
14	Tiger Moth sp. ( <i>Atlantarctia tigrina?</i> )				✓			
15	Black-tailed Skimmer ( <i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i> )					✓		
16	Common Bluet ( <i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i> )					✓		
17	Dainty Damselfly ( <i>Coenagrion scitulum</i> )					✓		
18	Horned Praying Mantis ( <i>Empusa pennata</i> )				✓			
19	Catalonian Owlfly ( <i>Libelloides cunii</i> )				✓			

















