



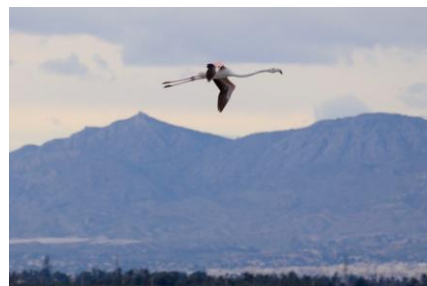
Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

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Valencia
25 February – 2 March 2016

Participants

Howard and Sue Bayliss
Desmond and Deborah Cassidi
Tim and Cheryl Hunt
Gill Page

Julia Maynard
Pat Boon
Brenda Motley
Maria-José Friedlander

Leaders

Pau Lucio and Chris Durdin

Report and lists by Chris Durdin

Names of places in this report are generally in Castilian Spanish:
there are also local spellings such as *Calpe* = *Calp*.

Photos by Chris Durdin unless noted otherwise. Other photos by Cheryl and Tim Hunt (CH, TH),
all taken on the holiday.

Cover, top row: giant orchid (TH) and tolpis.

Middle row: Audouin's gulls in Gandía harbour.

Bottom, mirror orchid, flying flamingo (CH) and winter lake at Albacete.



Above: the group.

We stayed at Hotel Font Salada www.fontsalada.com, below.



This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contribution of £40 per person was supplemented by Gift Aid and we were able to give €690 (£550) to the Grupo de Anillamiento Pit-Roig (pit-roig is the robin in the local language) which runs bird ringing stations in Valencia. We met the group at Pego Marsh – see account on page 7.

As at early March 2016, the total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 was £104,288.

DAILY DIARY

Thursday 25 February – to Valencia, paddyfields and coastal dunes

Gatwick South seems to have forgotten it's an airport terminal and thinks it's a shopping mall, but everyone seemed to navigate their way through to the departure gate, assisted or otherwise. The plane took off fairly promptly and it was a routine flight to the warm but windy Valencia airport. Pau was there to greet us, the Europcar paperwork was not too onerous and we walked across the road to find the minibuses in the car park.

Our first stop was only 20 minutes or so away, taking advantage of the huge area of paddy fields at Catorroja. The end of February was the ideal time to visit: the hunting season was over, during which water is retained, and the fields were in the process of being dried out to create smooth soil into which rice will be planted in May. This meant some dry areas but many very wet lagoons in which large numbers of birds were concentrated. Beyond a bank there were many greater flamingos in a lagoon. The first muddy areas had a good sprinkling of white wagtails and the odd meadow pipit, but eyes were inevitably drawn to quartering marsh harriers and especially numerous egrets. The first group were all little egrets; soon there were a few then many more great white egrets. Elsewhere, mostly a little later, there were concentrations of cattle egrets. Several times big groups of glossy ibises rose into the air, usually mixed in with egrets. On one occasion, a flock that must have been 500 ibises came past; a sight as spectacular as I've seen on any Mediterranean wetland. Scores of wintering crag martins flew lazily past, with two or three early house martins mixed in. There was a distant white stork and vegetated areas, a mix of giant reed, reed and scrub, held chiffchaffs, rather subdued Cetti's warblers and quite a few fan-tailed warblers, which zitted half-heartedly.

Lunch was in the '*primitiva*' restaurant in the harbour area, quiet at first but soon filling with locals. The food took some time to arrive, which I found a little trying as it was a warm day when being out was a draw, but then this is typical for a Spanish lunch and group members were quick to relax with a fine local white wine, starters of a local fish and eels then, eventually, an excellent '*arròs a banda*', like a paella.

Outside there were red admiral and speckled wood butterflies, and a little grebe called. Not far down the road we stopped by the road to watch night herons on their day roost, perhaps 20 or so half-hidden in the Aleppo pines by a housing estate, though Pau says there are actually some 200 there. I was pleased at the interest in a small bush of large yellow restharrow, which many touched to feel its stickiness.



Watching night herons.



The quay by the restaurant.

We took a walk on a wide, metalled path through the sand dune nature reserve of El Saler. Two of Pau's friends were there and kindly guarded the minibuses and luggage. The area is a conservation success story as it was threatened by a huge housing development by a large, landscaped lake. The main development was resisted, the dunes then restored but the lake was kept, which helped us add Sandwich tern and Audouin's gull to our tally. There was a good view of a black redstart and a fleeting one of Sardinian warbler, several painted lady butterflies and some interesting plants, such as false olive and joint-pine. The perfect late afternoon warmth and light probably kept us lingering there longer than we should have.

There was a back road through more paddyfields, with a purple swamphen at one point, many more egrets and herons and booted eagle from the minibus.

About an hour and quarter later we were beyond Oliva, and at a second attempt found the turn to Font Salada Hotel in among orange groves, arriving as it was getting dark. With rooms and key cards eventually sorted it was time for our evening meal and bed after a long day.

Friday 26 February – micro-reserves for flora and Monduver mountain

An 8:30 breakfast and we were away just after 9:30. Not far from base we stopped to look for orchids – in all cases *Ophrys* species (the bee orchid group). The warm, dry winter meant the season was well advanced but the specimens were small and perhaps affected by more recent cold weather, suggested Pau. The first was a rather sad-looking sawfly orchid. Crossing the road there were several sombre bee orchids *Ophrys fusca*, mostly past their best, but also one with a clear yellow edge to the lip, the very local *Ophrys lucentina*¹. It was Tim who was alert to the fourth species, a mirror orchid. Two other local specialities were a thyme *Thymus piperella* with a glorious, strong scent, though not in flower, and a rockrose, *Helianthemum marifolium*. The adjacent visitor centre had a visiting party of school children, a fine male black redstart on the roof and excellent loos.



Three flowers from the area that aren't in the usual field guides:
Narcissus dubius on Monduver mountain; *Ophrys lucentina* and *Silene diclinis*.

We drove part-way up Monduver mountain to a point where Pau had last night left his car to ferry us up the final steep and narrow stretch. As the advance guard got out, the hoped for alpine accentor flew from one of the radio mast's buildings, with a second bird, and disappeared out of view. With all 13 of us now on the mountain top we searched without luck for the wintering party of accentors, very recently numbering eight birds, though we did see some gorgeous little daffodils, identified as *Narcissus dubius* after later study – this species isn't in the Mediterranean floras. The first car load descended and I went to find Pau's rucksack, left around the back of the mountain-top, where Maria-José was watching all eight accentors that had recently flown in. I fetched Julia and Gill to see them, which may have pushed the birds back towards where Tim, Cheryl and Brenda were waiting. Cheryl took photos that even showed a ring on one accentor, put on by Pau's ringing group here on the wintering grounds, and zooming in later revealed it said A05. There still hasn't been a ringing recovery to indicate where the accentors breed – perhaps the Pyrenees. A couple of choughs came over and, once we were all assembled down the hill, a griffon vulture made a brief appearance, unusual here.



Snow well and picnic spot.

We had lunch on picnic tables by an old snow well, indicating colder weather two centuries ago when snow was packed under straw for sale in the following weeks. A grove of grafted orange trees proved productive for small birds including short-toed treecreeper, robin and chiffchaff, with serins twittering around us almost constantly. We then drove on for coffee in a nice bar, outside of which from one window was a foxglove tree and from another Sue found a female blackcap.

¹ *Ophrys lucentina* (this is the name given in the orchid 'bible' by Delforge, which notes that the name is from Alicante, ancient Lucentum of the Romans) is also known as *Ophrys dianica*. It's one of a group of *Ophrys* orchids midway in appearance between sombre bee orchids *Ophrys fusca* and yellow bee orchid *Ophrys lutea*.

We moved on a short distance to a walk at Barranc de Manesa, mostly a botanical walk on a woodland path with finds including beautiful flax and friar's cowl, though with time against us we didn't make it to the cork oaks. A further drive took us to an open maritime pine forest under which was one of Europe's scarcest plants, the pink *Silene diclinis*. A crested tit called and perched for a short time on a pine-top.

The return journey included calling in at a shop that was something like a cross between a food store, general store and hardware shop, offering everything from footwear to pest control. The goats' cheese was perhaps a better find than the tasting on offer of some rather ordinary local wines. Driving back through Oliva at dusk, the first bats were out and there was an extraordinarily loud chorus of house sparrows preparing to go to roost in the town's trees.

We caught up with bird checklists before dinner, the serving of which was helped by having chosen starters and main course at breakfast-time.

Saturday 27 February – El Fondo Natural Park and Salinas de Santa Pola

We had an earlier breakfast at 7:45 and were away sharp at 8:30 because of the long drive south and early closing on part of the nature reserve. An hour and half later, mostly on motorway, and we were in the right area. After diving into a bar for a quick loo stop and an almost as quick coffee for some, we then drove through the Natural Park's north gate. A black stork flew through. In the air not only were there crag and house martins but also several red-rumped swallows, which we watched as we moved along the path into the marsh to a viewing platform. There was a brisk wind as we scanned the lake, where there were numerous shovelers and marsh harriers over reedbeds. A flock of lapwings took flight from time to time, some 10 black-winged stilts were grouped together and there was a fly-past of some black-tailed godwits.

"What's that large dark lump?" wondered Cheryl. The lump was no less than a greater spotted eagle², one of a handful wintering in Spain in recent years: tracking has revealed that one, at least, comes from Estonia. The eagle was mobbed half-heartedly by a harrier without effect: it continued to sit out in the open all the time we were there, so everyone had a chance to see it through telescopes. Right place, right time, certainly, but the odds were against just turning up and seeing it, so a great stroke of luck. We exited the north gate at 11:45 and it was locked behind us.

We moved on within the Natural Park to another viewing platform over a smaller reedbed lagoon and we were blessed by 10 close white-headed ducks. So for a second time we had turned up and there was the celebrated rarity: this globally-threatened species is now showing a marked upturn in numbers and spread in range within Spain.



Bluethroat on the muddy path and white-headed duck. (CH)

A third stop took us along a mixture of boardwalk and muddy paths. Looking up a reedy ditch at the walk's start there was immediately a black-necked grebe and another white-headed duck. Then on a small, sheltered mere there were 15 black-necked grebes, mixed in with a few dabchicks, all remarkably close. The path deteriorated as we moved towards the hide, so some stayed back: those who went ahead enjoyed a bluethroat on the track, nipping in and out of the reeds. The rather small hide wouldn't have held the whole group anyway and it was exposed to the wind, but the large lake was still rich with birds despite the choppy surface. Black-necked grebes numbered in hundreds and there was one male red-crested pochard in with the common pochards.

The Natural Park's visitor centre was ideal for lunch as it had picnic tables, somewhat sheltered from today's fierce wind, and loos. It also overlooked a scrape over which barn swallows and crag martins were hawking for insects and a purple swamp-hen fed.

² Bird books traditionally called this species spotted eagle, but the name greater spotted eagle is increasingly used for *Aquila clanga* to avoid confusion with lesser spotted eagle or birds that could be either species.

In a different direction was a small lagoon on which, alongside some common coots, were two red-knobbed coots. The latter were distinctive partly on account of the red knobs on their foreheads but even more so because of white collars, put on these introduced birds so that wildfowlers won't shoot them.



Red-knobbed coots and the salinas of Santa Pola.

We headed inland into a Wild West style landscape of sandstone towers and cliffs. The hope was to find one of the local pair of Bonelli's eagles. Remarkably it was third time lucky, to turn up and see the hoped for rare bird – but to be fair, skill played a part as both Sue and Julia noticed the distant, pale dot on the cliffs at the same time. Again we had excellent telescope views and, better still, the eagle came off the cliff, then soared and dived in territorial display before it drifted away and out of sight.

We moved to the built-up coast for our final site for today, the salinas of Santa Pola. Water levels were high on this huge area of salt pans and it's mostly inaccessible – though that's good for keeping the birds free from disturbance by people. Happily there was a turn off the busy road through the salinas, adjacent to a restored tower that was once part of a chain to keep watch for Arab pirates. The many greater flamingos were to be expected. But flamingos weren't the only species pretty in pink: there was a fine, rosy-coloured slender-billed gull on a small lagoon, along with a greenshank and a small flock of little stints. By now the wind was fierce and cold and being outside the minibuses was becoming a struggle. We drove along the road that cut through the salinas, alongside which there were two groups of slender-billed gulls, one of which was a small party that seemed to be following a feeding flamingo to see what was disturbed. We made another short stop where avocets were close, but that was enough in the blustery conditions. We made it back by six o'clock, despite the minibuses getting separated on the last bit of the route.

Sunday 28 February – Calpe and Monnegre Gorge

It was a day of landscape contrasts. Heading south-east on the motorway, it was all wide open spaces, with no hint of the developed coast that was dominant once we were at Calpe and looking south from there along the Costa Blanca. We parked by another micro-reserve – for plants, mostly – within the town of Calpe. It looked rather unpromising at first, not so much because of the surroundings but on account of the dry winter and the amount of uprooting by wild boars. But actually there was plenty to find, starting with pink mallow-leaved convolvulus and purple pitch trefoil by the pavement. The short scramble into the reserve wasn't practical for Julia and Pat, so they remained up above and saw lots of birds, unlike the rest of us. Our eyes were mostly looking downwards, at flowers such as the dark-centred composite *Tolpis barbata*, wild gladioli and the red houndstongue *Cynoglossum cherifolium*. By a boardwalk there was a stonking giant orchid in perfect condition – so often they are well past their best on visits to the Mediterranean – and some groups of mirror orchids. The boardwalk led to a viewing area over the old salt pans of Calpe, which though ancient in origin now have the appearance of a municipal lake. There were good numbers of flamingos and several shelducks in the water, and a peregrine high in the clouds with the yellow-legged gulls. Our first clouded yellow butterfly of the holiday zapped past and there were several Lang's short-tailed blues around the bushes near the minibuses.

Towering over the tower blocks of Calpe was the large, Gibraltar-like limestone rock of the Parque Natural del Penyal D'Ifac (where the peregrine nests)³. The weather was a little changeable as we climbed the wide path to the information centre and loos: one moment you wondered why you had brought a fleece; the next moment you wanted two. It was fairly busy with people here on this Sunday lunchtime, such as families out for a walk and couples taking selfies. Below the centre we settled on the benches for the picnics that Pau had carried manfully up the hill. Being busy didn't mean there wasn't plenty of wildlife to note. The local yellow-legged gulls were plainly accustomed to people; a Mediterranean shag fished out at sea.

³ Information on a sign said: "It was a visual reference for seafarers in bygone days, this amazing limestone rock is 332 metres high and more than 1 km long, linked to the coast by a detritus isthmus, today it is an icon of the Valencian seaboard. Located in Calp, it was declared as a Nature Reserve on 19 January 1981, protecting its 45 hectares. Despite being the smallest Natural Reserve of the Valencian Community it is probably the most visited because of its location, its peculiar landscape and its historical and environmental values."

Special local plants included the pink *Silene secundiflora*, in a big patch on the bank about a wall, its stripy calyx tubes a nice feature. Two peas were named after Valencia region: *Coronilla valentina*, a scorpion-vetch, and *Hippocrepis valentina*, a horseshoe vetch.



Contrasting landscapes in Calpe: lagoon with flamingos and the Natural Park of Penyal D'Ifac.

After coffee in Calpe in a bar overlooking the flamingo lagoon, we headed farther south and inland to Monnegre Gorge. Pau described this well as a moon-like landscape; 'badlands' is another word that came to mind for the barren slopes and abandoned farms and terraced fields. Happily the rain on the journey there stopped just after we arrived, but that and the wind put paid to any ideas of more butterflies. Birds were a bit thin: our first linnets, a distant blue rock thrush but best of all, for those who didn't walk so far, a Dartford warbler close to the minibuses. Brenda carried a barely alive road casualty Egyptian locust nymph so all could see it. There was plenty of botanical interest, such as big bushes or small trees of joint-pine, shrubby globularia *Globularia alypum*, lots of the shrubby kidney-vetch *Anthyllis cytisoides*, the milk-vetch *Astragalus hispanicus* and the violet-purple crucifer *Moricandia arvensis*. A rayless composite was a puzzle, and the rather scarce *Anacyclus valentinus* seems to be the best fit.



Badlands of Monnegre Gorge and Font Salada.

Before returning to the hotel, we made a short visit to the *font salada* – salty font – after which the hotel is named. It's a concreted, open air pond where the water is warm year round and that and its saltiness encourages therapeutic uses. The fact that our hotel served fine salads, always one of the choices for the evening meal's starters, is an etymological coincidence.

Monday 29 February – Pego Marshes and Gandía Port

A very local trip this morning, to Pego Marshes just 15 minutes away from the hotel. There we met Juan and another colleague from Pau's bird ringing group who had erected a mist-net on a path through the reeds. Several birds, just caught, were ready to show us. We started with the reserve's star, a moustached warbler, another of which we'd already heard singing. We were able to see and photograph this mostly resident warbler (some also come to Pego from the south of France) alongside a sedge warbler, a very early migrant. We also saw chiffchaff, blackcap and a fine male penduline tit, and group members took it in turns to release these. I think we were all impressed by the volunteer team of Grupo de Anillamiento Pit-Roig, who were the recipients of the holiday's conservation donation (see page 2).

Pego Marshes is a Natural Park run by the local authority, like most nature reserves in Spain. It's a mixture of reedbeds and paddy fields, the latter varying from completely dry or full of water. Here and there were groups of egrets, a few glossy ibises and herons, but it was far from full of birds. At one stop we had good views of Audouin's gulls, and at another there were both pale and dark phase booted eagles along with the usual marsh harriers and various plants of disturbed ground.



Penduline tit and moustached warbler, ready for release after being ringed.

On the other side of the road that runs through the marsh we stopped for a short walk alongside a watercourse and by a reedbed. There were tiny American mosquito fish around a small bridge and much larger flathead grey mullets in the main ditch. The leg-stretch was welcome but it was all rather quiet for wildlife, at least until the sun came out. Two in the group then saw a blue-tailed damselfly, there were paper wasps drinking and a bright yellow and orange Moroccan orange-tip flew past.

We had lunch back at the hotel on what was becoming the sort of warm day you hope to enjoy in Spain. We had time to potter back at base, finding a paper wasp creating a 'nest' in an outside light and Pau found a gecko that shot into a gap in a bench. Several of the group came with me to see green-flowered birthwort tucked away in the orange orchard, near which a hummingbird hawkmoth fed from the over-generous supply of Bermuda buttercup flowers.

We headed off at three o'clock, drove around Oliva and down to coastal Gandía where we parked behind the fishermen's café on the quay. In the harbour was a large group of gulls, many of which were Audouin's gulls: they peak here at this time of year, Pau explained, before going to the Ebro Delta to nest. There were also Mediterranean gulls plus the usual black-headed and yellow-legged gulls, and several Sandwich terns were fishing.

It was a gloriously warm walk to the lighthouse at the end of the harbour, with quite a few locals out for a stroll plus many fishermen. Close inshore from our perch at the end was the surprise of two razorbills – or razorblades as Maria-José put it – an unusual species for the Mediterranean. Far out to sea, a fishing boat was on its way into port, and that was our main reason for coming: to see the seabirds that would be following the boat. About three gannets could be made out with the gulls at that stage, and Pau spotted Balearic shearwaters too, but both species had long melted away as the boat got sensibly within sight. A pale phase arctic skua hassled gulls for a meal, though this was a distant view, but not so for the dark phase arctic skua that left the boat and flew right past us, into the harbour's mouth then back again, a terrific view. Oddly, there were no more fishing boats: Pau was expecting the usual four or five, so after watching a final gannet we retraced steps to the minibuses and returned to the hotel.



Watching seabirds at Gandía; a fishing boat comes in, surrounded by gulls. (CH)

Pau had lent me an old guitar that after more than a little tuning (on a previous night) was on hand to accompany a few songs after dinner.

Tuesday 1 March – East Albacete steppes and wetlands

We had our usual 8:30 breakfast and a sharp getaway at 9:30 despite the hour and half drive, which had me wondering if another long journey was a good plan, this time out of Valencia and into the next door Castilla-La Mancha region. Well, it was a good plan – and that was a group consensus, not just me. The steppes east of Albacete were a huge contrast from what we'd seen before: wide open spaces, endless arable, yet punctuated with lakes, all but one of these seasonal wetlands created by rain water. We'd only just turned into the area when we found a group of 12 great bustards, which was quite a start. Around us, calandra larks sang and twisted and turned, and groups of overwintering skylarks were on the move. Out of the vehicles, the cold wind was a stark contrast to yesterday's Mediterranean warmth, and everyone stood in the lee of the minibuses to escape the wind that made it cooler than the 5.5°C it said on the dashboard.

The first lagoon had hundreds of wildfowl, with male red-crested pochards the most numerous followed by shovelers, coots and teals. The second wetland, adjacent to the village of Corral Rubio, was more interesting for waders in the shallows and the muddy edge: all in small numbers, but a good variety with black-tailed godwits, snipe, black-winged stilts, little ringed plovers and lapwings. A single redshank had a red colour-ring on its right thigh. In between wetlands there was a single hen harrier; other raptors today were lots of marsh harriers and several buzzards.

The highlight of wetland no. 3 was a flock of some 80 cranes, probably on route from wintering grounds in Extremadura back to northeast Europe. As well as being a delight to see it was a slight relief as I was the only person to see a single crane yesterday at Pego Marsh.



Laguna de Pétrola, the one permanent water body at Albacete.

We had our picnic inside a bar in the small town of Pétrola (Pau knew they'd be happy for us to do that), which was also very welcome for its loo and coffees. It was also a chance to catch up with recent pop videos, like it or not, though a more apt note for us was the collection of photos of scenery, flamingos and other wildlife. Leaving popular culture in the bar, we moved onto the subject of the photos: the Laguna de Pétrola, the one permanent lake in the area. We'd seen flamingos on the other lakes but this fourth one today was where they nest, on islands within the lagoon. We also had excellent views of a water pipit that fed on the water's edge close to the minibuses. We then had a look for lesser kestrels in *palomares* – pigeon-lofts – in a village next to the fifth lake, but it seemed that they hadn't yet arrived for spring.

Generally this was not a day for botany in the arable steppes, but splashes of yellow in crops and bare ground proved to be *Hypocoum imberbe*, an unusual member of the poppy flower with irregular petals that give it a rather rectangular shape. Nearby were patches of henbit deadnettle with leaves and stems almost as purple as the flowers.

We returned though the steppes, admiring the strong colour of the landscape, almost painting-by-numbers. The return journey seemed much shorter. Reunited with Debs, who'd been sketching while having a day 'at home', we took a group photo before getting organised for our final checklists and dinner. We started the meal with some Spanish *cava* and noted the group's holiday highlights.

Wednesday 2 March – return

A hoopoe called in the distance and serins displayed over the orange orchards. We all saw the pretty sunrise on this final morning at the Hotel Font Salada as we had an early breakfast at 7:30 to allow a departure at 8:15. It was a smooth if sometimes windy journey to Valencia where we refuelled the minibuses before returning them. We said goodbye to Maria-José, who was staying on for a few days, and to Pau. The easyJet flight left in good time and took us safely back to England, though with some interesting turbulence just before landing at a cold and wet Gatwick.

The best bits

Towards the end of our final evening meal at Hotel Font Salada we shared our holiday highlights, some of the best memories of the holiday.

Debs	White-headed duck and <i>Fagonia cretica</i> .
Desmond	Greater spotted eagle, slender-billed gull.
Brenda	The diversity of pine trees.
Sue	The relaxed local day, cranes.
Howard	Also the local day with its gentle walking.
Tim	Bonelli's eagle in the moon-like landscape.
Maria-José	Alpine accentors, so many, so close.
Pat	Bonelli's eagle, especially when it flew; and little birds in the hand at the ringing session.
Gill	Alpine accentor; display flight of the Bonelli's eagle.
Julia	Moustached warbler and the asymmetrical poppy, <i>Hypecoum imberbe</i> .
Pau	Bonelli's eagle and arctic skua.
Chris	500 glossy ibises over the paddy fields on our first day.



Fagonia cretica and the unusual poppy species *Hypecoum imberbe*.

Cheryl read us a poem about her highlight:

Your trilling call had sounded
As if to say "I'm here"
We searched in anticipation
We knew you must be near.

Some braved the narrow pathway
Around the headland shear
Some gripped the wire fencing
To help allay the fear.

What's that little brown bird creeping
Along the bush-lined wall?
Another flash of movement
Another little call.

We stand in total silence
Binoculars holding steady
"No – not a group of Dunnocks
Their sides were much too reddy.

Your little band of silver
Tells us who you are,
How many miles you've travelled
From hilltops near and far.

The thrill of having found you
Our patience now rewarded
Alpine Accentor A 0 5
Is gratefully recorded.



"With apologies to Lord Byron – Pam Ayres watch out!" says Cheryl.

WILDLIFE LISTS

NP = Natural Park

BIRDS

Little grebe	Heard or seen in three wetlands.
Great crested grebe	Seen in two wetlands.
Black-necked grebe	Hundreds in El Fondo NP.
Balearic shearwater	Pau saw two distant birds at sea at Gandía.
Gannet	About 4 at sea at Gandía.
Cormorant	At all wetlands.
Shag	1 at sea off Penyal D'Ifac NP at Calpe.
Cattle egret	Large numbers in three wetlands.
Little egret	Often large numbers in four wetlands.
Great white egret	Good numbers in the paddyfields and at Pego Marsh.
Grey heron	Seen on four days at various wetlands.
Night heron	A day-time roost on our arrival day.
Black stork	1 at El Fondo NP.
White stork	Single birds at the paddy fields and Albacete.
Glossy ibis	Impressive flocks including one of c.500 at the paddy fields. Also 4 at El Fondo and c.80 at Pego Marsh.
Greater flamingo	Seen on 5 days, often in large numbers, including well inland at Albacete.
Shelduck	Seen on 5 days.
Gadwall	2 at Albacete.
Teal	Small groups at El Fondo NP and Albacete.
Mallard	Seen on 4 days.
Shoveler	Large flocks at El Fondo NP and Albacete.
Red-crested pochard	2 at El Fondo NP then large flocks at Albacete.
Pochard	A few at El Fondo NP.
Ferruginous duck	A male at Albacete.
Tufted duck	A couple at El Fondo NP.
White-headed duck	Small groups at two wetlands at El Fondo NP.
Griffon vulture	1 at Monduver mountain.
Marsh harrier	Numerous at all main wetlands.
Hen harrier	A male on day 2 and a ringtail at Albacete.
Buzzard	Recorded on 4 days.
Greater spotted eagle	1 at El Fondo NP.
Bonelli's eagle	1 on day 3, distant but good views, including display flight.
Booted eagle	Seen on 3 days, a mix of light and dark phase birds.
Kestrel	Seen daily.
Peregrine	1 distant bird over Calpe.
Red-legged partridge	Seen best at the sand dunes on day 1, recorded one other day.
Water rail	Heard at 2 wetlands.
Moorhen	Seen on 4 days.
Purple swamp-hen	Seen on two days and heard at Pego Marsh.
Coot	Large numbers at freshwater wetlands.
Red-knobbed coot	2 very close birds with neck collars at the visitor centre at El Fondo NP, and another at distance elsewhere at El Fondo.
Crane	1 at Pego Marsh and a flock of 80 at Albacete.
Great bustard	A group of 12 at Albacete.
Avocet	Numerous at the Salinas of Santa Pola.
Black-winged stilt	Recorded at Salinas of Santa Pola and Albacete.
Little ringed plover	c.6 at Albacete.
Lapwing	On 3 days: the paddy fields, El Fondo and Albacete.
Little stint	15 at the Salinas of Santa Pola.
Dunlin	Recorded at the Salinas of Santa Pola.
Turnstone	Recorded at the Salinas of Santa Pola.
Ruff	1 with a flock of lapwings at El Fondo NP.
Snipe	From the visitor centre of El Fondo NP and several at Albacete.
Black-tailed godwit	c.10 at El Fondo NP and 4 at Albacete.
Redshank	Recorded at the Salinas of Santa Pola and Albacete.
Greenshank	1, Salinas of Santa Pola.
Common sandpiper	1, Salinas of Santa Pola.
Arctic skua	A pale phase skua chasing gulls at sea at Gandía, then a dark phase bird flew past.
Black-headed gull	Common at most wetlands.
Lesser black-backed gull	Single birds at Salinas of Santa Pola and Albacete.

Yellow-legged gull	Many pairs on territory at Penyal D'Ifac NP and numerous elsewhere.
Mediterranean gull	Gandía harbour only.
Audouin's gull	2 at the paddy fields, several at Pego Marsh and numerous in Gandía harbour.
Slender-billed gull	3 flew past at the paddy fields and several at Salinas of Santa Pola.
Sandwich tern	On 3 days, especially 6 in Gandía harbour.
Razorbill	2 on the sea at Gandía.
Feral pigeon	Recorded on 3 days.
Stock dove	Near the bustards at Albacete.
Woodpigeon	Recorded on 5 days.
Collared dove	Recorded on 6 days.
(Barn owl)	(Not seen, but pellets in a hide at El Fondo).
Swift sp.	1 at El Fondo NP, not seen well enough to be certain of species.
Kingfisher	Fleeting views at Pego Marsh.
Hoopoe	Flew past minibuses on 3 occasions, also calling at the hotel on the final morning.
Calandra lark	Seen well at Albacete.
Crested lark	Recorded on 2 days.
Thekla lark	Recorded on 3 days, but not seen well.
Skylark	Flocks at Albacete.
Crag martin	Lots of wintering birds over wetlands on 4 days.
Barn swallow	A few birds over wetlands on 4 days.
Red-rumped swallow	At least 20 at El Fondo NP.
House martin	Mixed in with other hirundines on 4 days.
Meadow pipit	Winter groups or individuals on 4 days.
Water pipit	Seen poorly on 2 days then very well at Albacete.
Grey wagtail	At Hotel Font Salada on 2 days.
White wagtail	Seen every day.
Wren	Heard or seen on 3 days.
Alpine accentor	8 on Monduver mountain.
Robin	Seen daily.
Bluethroat	1 female at El Fondo NP.
Black redstart	Seen daily.
Stonechat	Seen on 4 days.
Blackbird	Daily at the hotel.
Song thrush	Wintering birds around floral reserves on Gandía Mountains.
Mistle thrush	Flew in front of one minibus on the way back from Albacete.
Blue rock thrush	Distant view at Monnegre Gorge.
Cetti's warbler	Heard at the paddy fields and Pego Marsh.
Fan-tailed warbler	Heard or seen at the paddy fields, El Fondo and Pego Marsh.
Moustached warbler	Heard and seen in the hand at Pego Marsh.
Sedge warbler	Seen in the hand at Pego Marsh.
Dartford warbler	Good views near the minibuses at Monnegre Gorge.
Sardinian warbler	Seen or heard on 3 days.
Blackcap	Seen or heard on 4 days.
Chiffchaff	Seen or heard on 5 days.
Long-tailed tit	Seen or heard on the first 2 days.
Crested tit	Seen well in pine woods on day 2.
Coal tit	1 noted on day 2.
Great tit	Daily, especially at the hotel.
Penduline tit	In the hand and the field at Pego Marsh.
Short-toed treecreeper	Views at the snow well, day 2.
Iberian grey shrike	Seen on a wire from the minibuses close to El Fondo NP.
Jay	Heard in woodlands, day 2.
Magpie	Daily.
Red-billed chough	2 at Monduver.
Jackdaw	From the visitor centre at El Fondo NP, and Albacete.
Raven	1 at Monduver, also at Albacete.
Spotless starling	Daily.
House sparrow	Daily, including a noisy roost at dusk in Oliva.
Chaffinch	Seen on 5 days.
Serín	Displaying daily at Hotel Font Salada, and elsewhere.
Greenfinch	Seen on 4 days, especially at Hotel Font Salada.
Goldfinch	Seen on 4 days.
Linnet	At Monnegre Gorge and Albacete.
Reed bunting	Paddy fields and Pego Marsh.
Corn bunting	Albacete.

MAMMALS		
Wild boar <i>Sus scrofa</i> – rootings	Rabbit <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Pipistrelle <i>Pipistrellus</i> sp.
REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS		
Large psammodromus <i>Psammodromus algirus</i>	Moorish gecko <i>Tarentola mauretanica</i>	
FISH		
Mosquito fish <i>Gambusia</i> sp.	Flathead grey mullet <i>Mugil cephalus</i>	
BUTTERFLIES		
Large white	Clouded yellow	Southern speckled wood
Moroccan orange-tip	Red admiral	Wall brown
Brimstone	Painted lady	Lang’s short-tailed blue
OTHER INVERTEBRATES		
Blue-tailed Damselfly <i>Ischnura elegans</i>	Hawker sp., probably Migrant Hawker <i>Aeshna mixta</i>	
Pond skater, species unknown.	Egyptian grasshopper/locust <i>Anacridium aegyptium</i>	
Hummingbird hawk-moth <i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>	Pine processionary moth <i>Thaumetopoea pityocampa</i> tents	
Buff-tailed bumblebee	Paper wasp <i>Polistes</i> sp.	

PLANTS		
<p>Numbers on the right refer to Blamey & Grey-Wilson, <i>Mediterranean Wild Flowers</i>. Those without numbers are a mix of species widespread in Europe and local specialities. Some are planted, marked P. NiF = not in flower. Common northern European plants e.g. shepherd's purse, groundsel, were not usually noted; planted trees are noted when of special interest.</p>		
Pinaceae		
<i>Pinus halepensis</i>	Aleppo pine	1
<i>Pinus pinea</i>	Stone / umbrella pine	3
<i>Pinus pinaster</i>	Maritime pine	5
<i>Pinus canariensis</i> P	Canary pine	7
<i>Araucaria araucana</i> P	Canary Island pine	
Cupressaceae		
<i>Juniperus oxycedrus</i>	Prickly juniper	15
Fagaceae		
<i>Quercus coccifera</i>	Kermes oak	24
<i>Quercus rotundifolia</i>	Holm oak	26
Urticaceae		
<i>Urtica urens</i>	Annual nettle	
<i>Parietaria judaica</i>	Pellitory-of-the-wall	50
Aristolochiaceae		
<i>Aristolochia paucinervis</i>	Green-flowered birthwort	
Aizoaceae		
<i>Carpobrotus edulis</i>	Hottentot fig	115
Caryophyllaceae		
<i>Arenaria valentina</i> NiF	a sandwort endemic to Valencia	
<i>Silene diclinis</i>	(endemic to Spain)	
<i>Silene secundiflora</i>		
Papaveraceae		
<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>	Common poppy	283
<i>Hypecoum imberbe</i>		297
Ranunculaceae		
<i>Clematis flammula</i>	Fragrant clematis	205
Fumariaceae		
<i>Fumaria capreolata</i>	Ramping fumitory	303
Cruciferae		
<i>Alyssum alyssoides</i>	Small Alison	
<i>Diploxys erucoides</i>	White wall rocket	
<i>Lobularia maritima</i>	Sweet Alison	338
<i>Cardaria draba</i>	Hoary cress	353
<i>Moricandia arvensis</i>		354
<i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i>	Wild radish	369
<i>Sinapsis arvensis</i>	Charlock	359
Resedaceae		
<i>Reseda valentina</i>		
<i>Reseda alba</i>	White mignonette	375

Crassulaceae		
<i>Sedum sediforme</i>		362
<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort	396
Rosaceae		
<i>Prunus dulcis</i>	Almond	421
<i>Rubus ulmifolius</i> NiF	Elmleaf or thornless blackberry, Spanish zarzamora	
<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>	Mediterranean salad burnet	410
<i>Eriobotrya japonica</i> P	Loquat	
Leguminosae		
<i>Acacia dealbata</i> P	'Mimosa' or Silver wattle	432
<i>Anthyllis cytisoides</i>	a shrub kidney-vetch	688
<i>Astragalus hispanicus</i>		
<i>Cercis siliquastrum</i> P	Judas tree	430
<i>Ceratonia siliqua</i>	Carob	431
<i>Coronilla valentina</i>	a crown/scorpion vetch	695
<i>Hippocrepis valentina</i>		
<i>Lygos monosperma</i> NiF	Retama	480
<i>Spartium junceum</i>	Spanish broom	481
<i>Ononisatrix</i>	Large yellow restharrow	556
<i>Lotus creticus</i>	Southern birdsfoot trefoil	632
<i>Medicago intertexta</i>		602
<i>Psoralea bituminosa</i> NiF	Pitch trefoil	508
<i>Ulex parviflorus</i>	Small flowered gorse	473
Oxalidaceae		
<i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>	Bermuda buttercup	735
Geraniaceae		
<i>Erodium malacoides</i>	Mallow-leaved storksbill	752
<i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	Common storksbill	761
Zygophyllaceae		
<i>Fagona cretica</i>		766
Linaceae		
<i>Linum narborensense</i>	Beautiful flax	775
Euphorbiaceae		
<i>Euphorbia serrata</i>	Saw-leaved spurge	
<i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i>	Sun spurge	799
<i>Euphorbia characias</i>	Large Mediterranean spurge	799
<i>Mercurialis annua</i>	Annual mercury	820
<i>Mercurialis tomentosa</i>		
<i>Ricinus communis</i>	Castor oil plant	824
Meliaceae		
<i>Melia azedarach</i> P	Indian bead tree or Persian lilac	843
Polygalaceae		
<i>Polygala x dalmaisiana</i> P	Sweet pea shrub, planted at the hotel	
Anacardiaceae		
<i>Pistacia lentiscus</i>	Mastic tree or lentisc	865
Rhamnaceae		
<i>Rhamnus alaternus</i>	Mediterranean buckthorn	885
<i>Rhamnus lycioides</i>		887
Violaceae		
<i>Viola odorata</i>	Sweet violet	926
Thymelaeaceae		
<i>Daphne gnidium</i>	Daphne	936
<i>Thymelea hirsuta</i>		942
Cistaceae		
<i>Cistus crispus</i> P		960
<i>Cistus albidus</i>	Grey-leaved cistus	961
<i>Cistus monspeliensis</i> P	Narrow-leaved cistus	966
<i>Helianthemum marifolium</i>		1011
<i>Fumana</i> sp.		
Cactaceae		
<i>Opuntia maxima</i> = <i>ficus-indica</i>	Prickly pear	1040
Araliaceae		
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy	

Punicaceae		
<i>Punica granatum</i>	Pomegranate	1064
Umbelliferae/Apiaceae		
<i>Bupleurum rigidum</i>		1126
<i>Bupleurum frutescens</i> NiF	Shrubby hare's-ear	1128
<i>Ferula communis</i>	Giant fennel	1141
Ericaceae		
<i>Erica arborea</i>	Tree heath	1178
<i>Erica multiflora</i>		1186
Primulaceae		
<i>Anagallis arvensis</i>	Scarlet pimpernel	1198
Oleaceae		
<i>Phillyrea angustifolia</i>	Phillyrea or false olive	1246
<i>Olea europaea</i>	Olive	1248
Rubiaceae		
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Cleavers	
<i>Rubia peregrina</i>	Wild madder	1305
Convolvulaceae		
<i>Convolvulus altheiodes</i>	Mallow-leaved bindweed	1331
Boraginaceae		
<i>Echium plantagineum</i>	Purple viper's bugloss	1383
<i>Borago officinalis</i>	Borage	1395
<i>Lithodora fruticosa</i>	Shrubby gromwell	1355
<i>Cynoglossum creticum</i>	Blue houndstongue	1402
<i>Cynoglossum cherifolium</i>	a houndstongue	1404
Labiatae		
<i>Marrubium vulgare</i>	White horehound	1445
<i>Phlomis purpurea</i>		1465
<i>Lamium amplexicaule</i>	Henbit deadnettle	1478
<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	Rosemary	1526
<i>Lavandula dentata</i>	Toothed lavender	1530
<i>Satureja obovata</i> NiF		
<i>Thymus vulgaris</i> NiF	Thyme	1508
<i>Thymus piperella</i> NiF		
<i>Sideritis angustifolia</i> NiF		
Solanaceae		
<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Black nightshade	1563
<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	Shrub tobacco	1582
Scrophulariaceae		
<i>Verbascum sinuatum</i> NiF		1601
<i>Misopates orontium</i>	Lesser snapdragon / weasel's snout	1611
Orobanchaceae		
<i>Cistanche phelypaea</i>		1654
<i>Orobanche lastiquama</i>	parasitic on rosemary	
Globulariaceae		
<i>Globularia alypum</i>	Shrubby globularia	1677
Caprifoliaceae		
<i>Lonicera implexa</i>	a perfoliate honeysuckle	1713
Valerianaceae		
<i>Centranthus ruber</i>	Red valerian	1723
Dipsacaceae		
<i>Scabiosa atropurpurea</i>	Mournful widow	1749
Passifloraceae		
<i>Passiflora caerulea</i>	Passion flower, fruit	1679
Compositae / Asteracea		
<i>Anacyclus valentinus</i>		
<i>Anthemis arvensis</i>	Corn mayweed	
<i>Astericus maritimus</i>		1848
<i>Bellis annua</i>	Annual daisy	1791
<i>Centaura pullata</i>		2006
<i>Helichrysum serotinum</i>		
<i>Helichrysum stoechas</i>		1824
<i>Phagnalon sp. saxatile?</i>	Rock phagnalon	1833

<i>Chrysanthemum coronarium</i>	Crown daisy	1895
<i>Calendula arvensis</i>	Field marigold	1908
<i>Galactites tomentosa</i>	Galactites	1971
<i>Silybum marianum</i> NiF	Milk thistle	1982
<i>Tolpis barbata</i>	Tolpis	2030
Liliaceae		
<i>Aphyllanthes ramosus</i> NiF		
<i>Asphodelus fistulosus</i>	Hollow-leaved asphodel	2087
<i>Asphodelus aestivus</i>	Asphodel	2089
<i>Gladiolus illyricus</i>		2308
<i>Urginea maritima</i>	Sea squill, leaves/bulbs	2163
<i>Smilax aspera</i>	berries	2222
<i>Muscari neglectum</i>	Grape hyacinth	2206
<i>Asparagus horridus</i>		
<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>	Common asparagus	2218
<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i>	Butcher's broom, berries	2219
Amaryllidaceae		
<i>Pancratium maritimum</i> NiF	Sea daffodil	2270
<i>Narcissus dubius</i>		
Agavaceae		
<i>Agave americana</i>		2253
Iridaceae		
<i>Gynandris sisyrinchium</i>	Barbary nut iris	2305
<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	Yellow flag	2290
<i>Arum italicum</i>	Italian lords and ladies	2361
<i>Arisarum vulgare</i>	Friar's cowl	2377
Palmae		
<i>Chamaerops humilis</i>	Dwarf fan palm	2357
Orchidaceae		
<i>Ophrys speculum</i>	Mirror orchid	2422
<i>Ophrys fusca</i>	Sombre bee orchid	2424
<i>Ophrys tenthredinifera</i>	Sawfly orchid	2442
<i>Ophrys lucentina</i> (= <i>O. dianica</i>)		
<i>Himantoglossum</i> (or <i>Barlia</i>) <i>robertianum</i>	Giant orchid	2446
Gramineae/Poaceae		
<i>Brachypodium phoenicoides</i>		
<i>Brachypodium retusum</i>	Mediterranean false brome	2466
<i>Arundo donax</i>	Giant reed	2494
<i>Avena</i> sp.	Wild oats	
<i>Phragmites australis</i>	Reed	
<i>Stipa offneri</i>		
Nymphaeaceae		
<i>Nymphaea alba</i>	White water-lily	
FERNS PTERIDOPHYTA		
<i>Ceterach officinarum</i>	Rustyback fern	2532
<i>Polypodium cambricum</i>	Southern Polypody	2538



The crucifer *Moricandia arvensis*; green-flowered birthwort *Aristolochia paucinervis*; and *Coronilla valentina*, on which you can see the typical pods with a scorpion-like end of scorpion-vetches.



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