Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

REPORT ON AUTUMN HOLIDAY FOR SYLVIA, PETER AND JOHN

Martin Kelsey

Itinerary (5th October to 14th October 2017)



5th October 2017: Transfer from Madrid

6th October 2017: Plains near Campo Lugar and rice fields near Palazuelo

7th October 2017: Cañamero and Villuercas Mountains

8th October 2017: Plains to the west and north of Trujillo

9th October 2017: Monfragüe National Park

10th October 2017: Alcollarín Reservoir and rice fields near Palazuelo

11th October 2017: Talaván Reservoir, River Almonte and Cáceres

12th October 2017: Belén Plains, River Ibor and Castañar del Ibor

13th October 2017: Arrocampo Reservoir, Valdecañas dam and Miravete Pass.

14th October 2017: Transfer to Madrid airport.

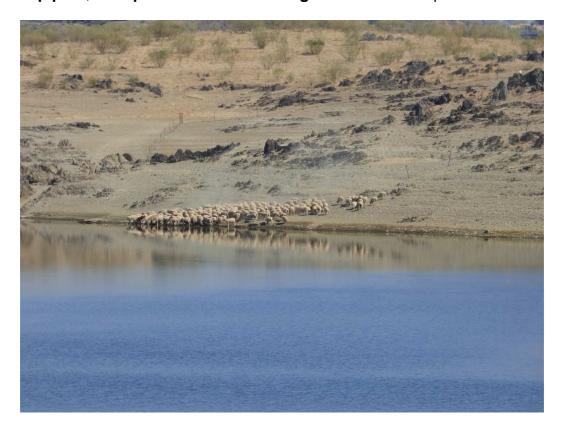
6th October 2017: Plains near Campo Lugar and rice fields near Palazuelo

The forecast of unseasonably hot weather this week meant that an early start was called for and we arrived at the plains of Campo Lugar as the sun was still low in the sky. At our very first stop we were rewarded by several sightings of **Great Bustard**, on the ground and in flight, a **Little Bustard** and a hunting female **Hen Harrier**. **Northern Wheatears** were on the fences and as we lingered along the road, we also had good views of a group of **Black-bellied**

Sandgrouse feeding on the ground. Further along, as we took a rough road, we spotted perched on the fence ahead of us a juvenile **Golden Eagle**. We had time to admire its size and plumage before it flew off, in our direction and then to settle again on a more distant rock. **Whinchats** and **Pied Flycatchers** were also seen on the wires along this track and we had excellent views of both **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**. **Red-veined Darters** perched on the wires and we found a few brave flowering specimens of **Merendera**.

After coffee, we headed south to the rice fields, where harvest was underway. White Storks, Cattle and Little Egrets stood in the stubble fields. We found a wet field with a nice selection of waders including Ringed and Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Dunlin and Lapwing. A Water Rail came right out into the open as we arrived. A majestic adult Peregrine sat on a pylon overlooking the scene, with a Buzzard on a pylon just a bit further along. Iberian Bluetails, hundreds of Red-veined Darters, and a few Lesser Emperors hawked over the mud.

A rather overgrown picnic area beside the village of Palazuelo offered us a modicum of shade for lunch, whilst **Cetti's Warblers** sang from the marsh beside us and a **Zitting Cisticola** perched obligingly nearby. After lunch we proceeded along the rice fields and stopped beside the River Ruercas where we saw both **Common Waxbill** and **Red Avadavat**, including a male of the latter in full breeding plumage. Returning to the plains, we paused beside the Sierra Brava reservoir, with chronically low water levels. A few **Great Crested Grebes** and **Black-headed Gulls** were present. Two **Moorish Geckoos** were sunning themselves at the edge of the information panel about the site. Our final stop was a small pool close to Zorita, where a **Greenshank**, **two Green Sandpipers**, a **Snipe** and some **Little Ringed Plovers** were present.



7th October 2017: Cañamero and Villuercas Mountains

In response to the forecast yet again of hot weather, today we sought refuge at attitude, in the Villuercas Mountains. Our first stop was beside the river close to Cañamero, where there is a small cave (an overhang really) with some 8000-year-old rock paintings. The low sun was lighting up the western side of this deep valley and on clumps of Daphne, butterflies such as Lang's Short-tailed and Long-tailed Blues were feeding. Small birds such as Long-tailed Tits, Blackcaps and Robins were present, but best of all was a Rock Bunting found by Sylvia.

After coffee in the town, we then drove past Guadalupe and up to towards the Villuercas peak. On the way we stopped at the magnificent Snow Well, no less than seven metres deep. **Grayling** butterflies were present and we saw several **Dartford Warblers**. Against vast, deep blue sky **Griffon Vultures** glided overhead. We continued to the peak itself where we had magnificent views thanks to the amazingly clear air conditions. Clusters of butterflies were present, such as **Wall Brown** and **Clouded Yellows** and we saw a good selection of birds including **Red-billed Chough**, several **Black Redstart** and **Blue Rock Thrush** and a very late **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**.

After our picnic there we descended on the north-western flank of the mountain, stopping again beside the river at Cañamero. **Migrant Hawkers** were in view and we enjoyed a pleasant half an hour so beside the river before returning to the house.

8th October 2017: Plains to the west and north of Trujillo

Today we headed west of the local town Trujillo, onto the plains at the edge of a belt of holm oak *dehesa*. The intense drought has made this landscape appear almost sterile, but at our feet we found a few **Serotine Narcissus** and amongst the birds there were a few signs of winter with a female **Merlin** flying past at close range, some **Meadow Pipits** heard and two **Stock Doves** flying over. Both **Crested** and **Thekla Larks** offered us excellent views as we walked down a dirt track and the fences also provided perches for **Iberian Grey Shrikes**, **Northern Wheatears** and **Stonechats**. We waited in view of a small pool of water and luckily did not have to wait long before a flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** appeared from the east and after making a few wide arcs in the sky came down to drink and rest by the water.

After coffee near the town of Sierra de Fuentes, we took a minor road towards Santa Marta de Magasca. We had good views of about a dozen **Great Bustard** and on a viewpoint overlooking the Tamuja River, a distant view **of Short-toed Eagle**. A picnic area close to the village offered us shade for lunch.



To the north of the village we stopped beside the largely dried-up Magasca River, finding a small pool where there were a few dragonfly species, as well as **Kingfisher** and **Green Sandpiper**. Just before leaving we had a good view of a **Cirl Bunting**. We then made a short walk onto a medieval drover's trail, the heat of the afternoon made everything very quiet. We saw a few **Calandra Larks**, **Northern Wheatear** and on the ground three **Serotine Narcissus**, but very little else. It was time then to return to rest at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

9th October 2017: Monfragüe National Park

Another hot and sunny day, although at our first stop on the castle ridge of the Monfragüe National Park, a fresh northerly wind gave us an unexpected sensation of cool! From the ridge and the castle, we had magnificent views southwards over the *dehesas* towards Trujillo and to the north with the Monfragüe ridges, the Tagus River and the Gredos Mountains beyond. **Griffon Vultures** glided past and we also had superb views of a **Hawfinch** feeding on wild olives and two **Firecrest**.

We stopped in front of the iconic Peña Falcon rock, where we did indeed see a **Peregrine Falcon**, but pride of place was obviously taken by the vultures, mainly **Griffon**, but a few **Black Vultures** as well, including one perched high on the rock face.

We drove through the park for a coffee stop at the Puerta de Monfragüe and then had lunch at the Portilla del Tietar viewpoint. Parties of **Great Cormorant** and a few **Little Egret** flew past and we enjoyed excellent views of more **Griffon Vultures**. A few **Autumn Snowflakes** were growing on the arid bank beside the road. As we returned through the park, we saw several **Red Deer**,

including a couple of fine stags. At one point we watched a **Red Deer** swimming across the Tiétar River. In a clump pf pines, there were **Crested Tit** and **Common Chiffchaff**. We enjoyed an afternoon stop watching a myriad of birds coming to drink and bathe, especially **Blackcaps**, with sometimes as many as seven together. They were joined by **Hawfinch**, titmice, **Chaffinches**, **Robins** and **Blackbirds**.



We made a final stop beside a fishing lake close to the River Tozo. Here there were **Pied Flycatchers**, **Little Egret**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Common Sandpiper**, but dragonflies were of special interest. Female **Northern Banded Groundlings** were on the dry shallow bank of the lake, whilst on a pool on the Tozo, were **Violet Dropwing**, **Scarlet Darter** and **Common Darter**.

10th October 2017: Alcollarín Reservoir and rice fields near Palazuelo

Today we again headed southwards, stopping to check the small village pond near Zorita where there was a nice selection of waders, viewable with excellent light, including **Dunlin**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Greenshank** and **Black-winged Stilt**. From there we spent the rest of the morning at the Alcollarín Reservoir. As we arrived we had good views of a **Woodlark**. We stopped on the western shore, where there were large numbers of duck, including **Mallard**, some **Wigeon**, **Shoveler** and **Gadwall**. A group of **Spoonbill** were joined by another, making a total of over twenty birds. After a break for coffee, we then explored the eastern shore, where **Pintail** were also seen, a distant **Avocet** and an even more distant **Mediterranean Gull**. Both **Crested Lark** and **Thekla Larks** were seen, as well as **Pied Flycatcher**, **Common Chiffchaff** and **Kingfisher**. We had our picnic in the shade of holm oaks.

We then revisited the rice fields near Palazuelo. Highlights here included additional waders for the list such as **Spotted Redshank** and **Ruff**. We also saw a single **Black Stork** and the fine **Peregrine** was seen again, perched on the same pylon. But most memorable was watching the work of a tractor mashing up the rice stubble. This in turn attracted a vast number of **egrets**, **herons** and **gulls** (**Black-headed** and **Lesser Black-backed**).



11th October 2017: Talaván Reservoir, River Almonte and Cáceres

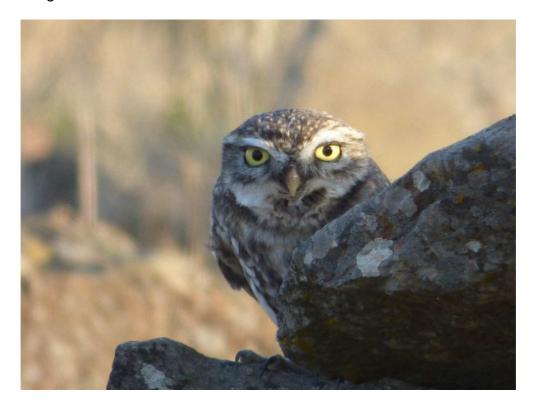
Today we headed west from Trujillo and then north from the city of Cáceres to visit the small reservoir of Talaván, set out in the arid plains. The low water level had resulted in extensive muddy banks and so there were a good selection of waders, such as **Snipe** and **Greenshank**, as well as **Teal** and **Shoveler** on the water. We also had excellent views of **Water Rail**, a **Spanish Sparrow** and brief views of a hunting male **Merlin** and a **Sparrowhawk**. The dragonflies were of particular interest, especially **Southern Darter** and **Migrant Hawker**.

After coffee in Monroy we drove down to the River Almonte where we had our picnic. Two **Alpine Swifts** were seen along with the **Crag Martins** close to the road bridge, **Griffon Vultures** passed overhead, whilst **wagtails** were present at the water's edge.

The afternoon was spent exploring the historic centre of Cáceres, a World Heritage Site.

12th October 2017: Belén Plains, River Ibor and Castañar del Ibor

In the relative cool of the period just after dawn (it quite quickly warmed up!) we set off to the Belén Plains just east of Trujillo. Here we had lovely views early on of a **Little Owl** (and saw four more during the morning) and a flock of 17 **Little Bustard**, probably disturbed by men and dogs out on the fields on the first day of hunting for the winter.



Spanish Sparrows and Corn Buntings lined the fences and we saw good numbers of Lapwing and a few Northern Wheatear as well. Red Kites languidly flew across the arid plains. We also had distant views of a male Hen Harrier. We spotted a large raptor perched on pylon beside the road and found a convenient place to stop without disturbing it. We were very happy to find that it was an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle and we had very prolonged views of it. We then drove past the bird and found another stopping place where we could continue enjoying watching it, this time in better light. Most satisfactory of all was being able to continue onwards afterwards, leaving the bird in peace.

We had coffee close to the A5 motorway and then drove north-east, through Deleitosa before reaching the River Ibor where we had our picnic. **Common Darters** were ovipositing on muddy puddles and we had frequent views **of Grey Wagtails** hawking insects beside the water. A Pied Flycatcher was also present. Being a public holiday there were a few families present, either swimming in river or catching crayfish.

After lunch we walked through an area of smallholdings and sweet chestnut groves where **Migrant Hawkers** were present and a range of butterflies including **Purple Hairstreak**. There were masses of **Blackcaps** present, as well as **Robins**, **Blackbirds** and **Long-tailed Tits**.

After a refreshing cold drink in a nice shady patio we returned to Trujillo, to do a little foodie shopping.

13th October 2017: Arrocampo Reservoir, Valdecañas dam and Miravete Pass.

Today we ventured north-east to visit the Arrocampo Reservoir, close to the village of Saucedilla. We spent the first part of the morning walking beside the marsh near the village. **Purple Swamphens**, although vocal, barely showed themselves, but we did get good views of **Marsh Harrier**, **Whinchat**, **Great Egret** and good numbers of **Long Skimmers**. After coffee we headed west of the village and were rewarded with an excellent sighting of **Black-winged Kite**. We also stopped by a small lake, diminished in size because of the drought, where there were countless **Merenderas** in flower. Present at the shore were a few waders, including an **Avocet**, as well as a good collection of egrets and **Great Cormorants**.

After lunch we checked another area of marsh, where **Iberian Bluetails** were present and then moved onto the wooded valley near the Valdecañas Dam, Here we had good, if distant, views of **Black Wheatear**, as well as **Griffon** and **Black Vulture**.

After a stop at the Miravete Pass, where we had great views across the Tiétar valley towards the Gredos Mountains and south over the plains and dehesas near Trujillo, we headed into the town to complete some shopping before returning to El Recuerdo.

Species lists

Birds

- 1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
- 2. **Wigeon**: About half a dozen at Alcollarín on 10th October.
- 3. Gadwall: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo Reservoirs.
- 4. **Teal**: Seen on several days with good numbers at Alcollarín and Talaván Reservoirs.
- 5. Mallard: Seen most days.
- 6. **Pintail**: About six seen at Alcollarín on 10th October.
- 7. **Shoveler**: Good numbers at Alcollarín and Talaván Reservoirs.
- 8. Little Grebe: Seen on several days with large numbers at Alcollarín.
- 9. **Great Crested Grebe**: Large numbers at Alcollarín, also present at Sierra Brava Reservoir and Arrocampo.
- 10. **Black-necked Grebe**: Two or three seen at Alcollarín on 10th October.
- 11. **Great Cormorant**: Seen most days with large numbers (100+) in Monfragüe National Park.
- 12. Little Bittern: Heard at Arrocampo.
- 13. Cattle Egret: Seen especially in the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
- 14. **Little Egret**: Seen most days, with small numbers on the rice fields and Arrocampo.
- 15. **Great Egret**: Seen on the rice fields, at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.

- 16. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost every day.
- 17. **Black Stork**: One over rice fields near Palazuelo on 10th October.
- 18. White Stork: About 20 seen on rice fields on each visit.
- 19. **Spoonbill**: 22 at Alcollarín on 10th October.
- 20. Griffon Vulture: Seen daily.
- 21. **Black Vulture**: Seen on several days, especially at Monfragüe and near Arrocampo.
- 22. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: An adult seen on Belén plains on 12th October.
- 23. **Golden Eagle**: An immature seen on Campo Lugar plains on 6th October.
- 24. **Short-toed Eagle**: One adult seen over Tamuja River on 8th October.
- 25. Red Kite: Seen almost every day.
- 26. Marsh Harrier: Seen most days especially on rice fields.
- 27. **Hen Harrier**: A female seen on Campo Lugar plains on 6th October, a female flying over Monfragüe on 9th and a male on Belén plains on 12th.
- 28. **Common Buzzard**: Seen daily. One mobbed by 12 Magpies at Arrocampo.
- 29. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen on three days as well as on return journey to Madrid.
- 30. Common Buzzard: Single figures seen almost daily.
- 31. Black-winged Kite: One seen at Arrocampo on 13th October.
- 32. Common Kestrel: Seen daily.
- 33. **Peregrine Falcon**: Seen on rice fields on 6th and 10th October, and at Monfragüe on 9th.
- 34. **Merlin**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo on 8th October and near Talaván Reservoir on 11th.
- 35. **Water Rail**: Seen on rice fields on 6th October, Talaván on 11th and Arrocampo on 13th.
- 36. **Moorhen**: Recorded in rice fields and at Arrocampo.
- 37. Purple Swamphen: Seen at Arrocampo on 13th October.
- 38. Common Coot: Present at Alcollarín and Arrocampo reservoirs.
- 39. Little Bustard: One on plains near Campo Lugar on 6th October and 17 on Belén plains on 12th.
- 40. **Great Bustard**: 17 near Campo Lugar on 6th October and 11 on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 8th October.
- 41. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on pool near Zorita, Talaván Reservoir and Charco Salado.
- 42. **Avocet**: One at Alcollarín on 10th October and one at Charco Salado on 13th October.
- 43. **Ringed Plover**: Single figures seen on rice fields on 6th and 10th October.
- 44. Little Ringed Plover: Seen almost daily.
- 45. Northern Lapwing: Seen almost daily.
- 46. **Dunlin**: Seen on rice fields and on pool near Zorita.
- 47. Little Stint: About 15 on rice fields on 6th October and also seen on 10th.
- 48. Ruff: Seen on rice fields on 6th October and also on 10th.
- 49. Common Snipe: Seen on rice fields, Talaván and Arrocampo.
- 50. **Common Redshank**: Small numbers on rice fields on 10th October.
- 51. **Spotted Redshank**: Small numbers on rice fields on 10th October.
- 52. Greenshank: Seen most days on rice fields and water bodies.

- 53. **Green Sandpiper**: Seen almost daily.
- 54. **Common Sandpiper**: Seen on some water bodies.
- 55. Black-headed Gull: Seen almost daily.
- 56. **Mediterranean Gull**: One at Alcollarín on 10th October.
- 57. Lesser Black-backed Gull: Seen on rice fields.
- 58. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains near Campo Lugar on 6th October and heard west of Trujillo on 8th October.
- 59. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse: About 40 seen west of Trujillo on 8th October.
- 60. Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon: Recorded daily.
- 61. Wood Pigeon: Seen on return to Madrid.
- 62. Stock Dove: Two west of Trujillo on 8th October.
- 63. Collared Dove: Seen daily.
- 64. **Little Owl**: Heard most days and five seen on Belén plains on 12th October.
- 65. Alpine Swift: Two at River Almonte on 11th October.
- 66. Kingfisher: Seen most days.
- 67. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
- 68. Great Spotted Woodpecker: Recorded on three days
- 69. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: One heard at Monfragüe on 9th October.
- 70. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains near Campo Lugar and Santa Marta de Magasca.
- 71. Crested Lark: Seen daily.
- 72. Thekla Lark: Seen daily.
- 73. Woodlark: Seen at Alcollarín.
- 74. **Skylark**: Two seen on Belén plains on 12th October.
- 75. Sand Martin: Seen on rice fields on 6th October.
- 76. Crag Martin: Seen almost daily.
- 77. Barn Swallow: Three at Talaván on 11th October.
- 78. House Martin: Seen on three days.
- 79. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen on most days.
- 80. Yellow Wagtail: Seen on rice fields and at Alcollarín and Talaván.
- 81. Grey Wagtail: Seen on several days.
- 82. White Wagtail: Seen almost daily.
- 83. Wren: Recorded on a few days.
- 84. **Dunnock**: Seen at Villuercas Peak on 7th October.
- 85. **Robin**: Seen daily from 7th October.
- 86. Black Redstart: Seen daily.
- 87. Stonechat: Seen daily.
- 88. Whinchat: Single birds seen on plains and also Arrocampo.
- 89. **Northern Wheatear**: Seen almost daily with a good passage on plains also seen at Arrocampo on 13th October.
- 90. Black Wheatear: Two birds seen near Valdecañas Dam on 13th October.
- 91. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Singles seen at Monfrgaüe, Villuercas Peak and at Valdecañas.
- 92. **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**: A male seen at Villuercas Peak on 7th October.
- 93. Blackbird: Seen daily.
- 94. Mistle Thrush: Seen on two days.
- 95. **Song Thrush**: Seen daily from 9th October.
- 96. Cetti's Warbler: Recorded almost daily.

- 97. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on rice fields, Alcollarín and at Arrocampo.
- 98. **Reed Warbler**: One seen at Arrocampo on 13th October.
- 99. Dartford Warbler: Seen and/or heard on three days.
- 100. **Sardinian Warbler**: Recorded daily.
- 101. **Common Whitethroat**: Seen on 6th and 8th October.
- 102. Blackcap: Seen daily.
- 103. **Iberian Chiffchaff**: One at Arrocampo on 13th October.
- 104. **Chiffchaff**: Seen daily.
- 105. Willow Warbler: Seen on 9th, 11th and 13th October.
- 106. **Pied Flycatcher**: Recorded almost daily.
- 107. **Long-tailed Tit**: Recorded on several days.
- 108. **Crested Tit**: Seen at Monfragüe on 9th October.
- 109. **Blue Tit**: seen almost daily.
- 110. **Great Tit**: Seen almost daily.
- 111. **Nuthatch**: Recorded near Cañamero.
- 112. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Recorded on several days.
- 113. **Penduline Tit**: Flock of 14 at Talaván on 11th October.
- 114. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
- 115. **Jav**: Seen on several days.
- 116. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
- 117. **Magpie**: Seen daily.
- 118. **Red-billed Chough**: Three at Villuercas Peak on 7th October.
- 119. **Jackdaw**: Seen almost daily.
- 120. **Raven**: Seen almost daily.
- 121. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
- 122. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
- 123. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields, on plains and at Arrocampo.
- 124. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields.
- 125. **Rock Sparrow**: Seen briefly at River Almonte on 10th October.
- 126. **Common Waxbill**: Seen on several days.
- 127. Red Avadavat: Seen on rice fields.
- 128. **Chaffinch**: Seen almost daily.
- 129. **Serin**: Seen on several days.
- 130. **Siskin:** Three seen over River Ibor on 12th October.
- 131. **Greenfinch**: Seen on several days.
- 132. **Goldfinch**: Seen daily.
- 133. **Linnet**: Seen at Arrocampo.
- 134. **Hawfinch**: Seen well at Monfragüe.
- 135. **Cirl Bunting**: Seen beside River Magasca on 8th October.
- 136. **Rock Bunting**: Seen near Cañamero.
- 137. **Corn Bunting**: Seen almost daily.

Butterflies

- 1. Swallowtail
- 2. Small White
- 3. Bath White
- 4. Clouded Yellow
- 5. Brimstone

- 6. Cleopatra
- 7. Purple Hairstreak
- 8. Small Copper
- 9. Long-tailed Blue
- 10. Lang's Short-tailed Blue
- 11. African Grass Blue
- 12. Holly Blue
- 13. Brown Argus
- 14. Common Blue
- 15. Geranium Bronze
- 16. Painted Lady
- 17. Large Tortoiseshell
- 18. Red Admiral
- 19. Cardinal
- 20. Grayling
- 21. Meadow Brown
- 22. Speckled Wood
- 23. Wall Brown
- 24. Mallow Skipper
- 25. Hummingbird Hawk Moth

Odonata

- 1. Iberian Bluetail
- 2. Western Willow Spreadwing
- 3. Migrant Hawker
- 4. Lesser Emperor
- 5. Broad Scarlet
- 6. Epaulet Skimmer
- 7. Long Skimmer
- 8. Red-veined Darter
- 9. Common Darter
- 10. Southern Darter
- 11. Violet Dropwing
- 12. Banded Groundling

Other wildlife

Mud Dauber Wasp Iberian Water Frog Stripeless Tree Frog Geniez's Wall Lizard Moorish Gecko Red Deer Iberian Hare

Notable Plants

Merendera

Stinkwort Sticky Fleabane Serotine Narcissus Autumn Snowflake Sternberg