

## Holiday Highlights

### Catalunya

11-18 May 2019

**Guides:** Duncan Macdonald and Ricard Gutiérrez

**Guests:** David Johnston, Penny & Keith Chantler, Belinda & Steve Batt, Jane Moore, Marilyn Davidson

**Day 1:** It is an early start for us this morning, meeting at 5am to then check in and get through to departures, grab some breakfast before our 7am flight to Barcelona. The Pyrenees have lots of snow on them as we pass over and start our descent into the airport. We get a super view of the city as we have to go out to sea in order to turn and land.

We collect our luggage and meet Ricard, our Catalan guide and head to the car hire to collect our vehicles. Car chosen, bags stowed and binoculars at the ready we are off! Whoop whoop!

Ricard takes us only a short distance from the airport, to an area of the Llobregats Delta in order to get a few species under our belts before heading north to the Pyrenees. It is a good choice. There is a very obliging Hoopoe in a field before the car park and as we park we can hear Nightingale and Cetti's Warbler. A short walk takes us to a bridge over a canalised river. Scanning from here we are soon into some birds. Cattle Egrets are flying over along with Yellow-legged Gulls; in the river we find Black-winged Stilts, Common and Wood Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover, Mallard and a lone Glossy Ibis standing on the wall. There are Serins and Greenfinch in the trees, Goldfinches fly over and a Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler) is displaying.

We walk onto a pond with a blind. Through the gaps we can scan the water. There really isn't very much. We find a Coot and Ricard points out some turtles that have been introduced from America. Belinda then spots a high raptor and gets us onto it. It is a long way off, but obviously an eagle of some description. Ricard gets his scope on it and finds that it is a Bonelli's Eagle! Wow! We watch as it soars closer and is then joined by a second bird. A pair. Amazing that these birds are here given that we are still in the city! They soar around together giving us superb views of their plumage. What superb raptors they are.

We have to go back to the car hire and do a bit of shopping after lunch and are then on the road to the high Pyrenees of Catalunya. It is dark by the time we park in front of our hotel. We are shown to our rooms and then we gather for a cold buffet and a well earned drink after a long day.

**Day 2:** Steve, David, Penny and Keith are all up and out before breakfast to explore the vicinity. Steve and David spot a couple of Lammergeiers while Penny and Keith get both Dipper and Grey Wagtail on the river that rushes past our superb hotel. The village that we are in nestles at the feet of the mountains. The sky is a clear blue, the air cold now but we are sure it will warm up.

After a scrumptious breakfast we are loading the cars when a Turtle Dove is spotted on the far bank of the river. We have an appointment to keep and so we had better crack on. We have an appointment with the vulture man and our road is windy through the mountains to reach our meeting point. Jordi is there as arranged with his 4x4 and he leads us in convoy up a steep mountain road, through forests of beech and oak to begin with turning to conifer as we get higher. The road leads to a small mountain village and a large house that perches above the valley. Jordi has developed this as a place to observe and photograph vultures. As we park we notice around 300 Griffon Vultures swirling high in the sky above us!

We are formally introduced and we find out that Jordi has been instrumental in the Catalan Black Vulture conservation and release project. They have managed to get 14 breeding pairs in just 10 years! He puts food out for the birds just once a week and never the same day, so the birds don't know when it is going to happen. He has two spaces in his vehicle and offers them to two of the group – wow! The group decides that Steve and Marilyn should be the lucky duo and we wave them off and then watch as the vehicle picks its way up the opposite side of the small valley to the feeding area. As soon as the Jordi and another get out to grab the buckets of food the vultures start to pour out of the sky as if they have been emptied from a tap. More and more and yet more descend towards the vehicle, landing on the ground and swarming around the truck obscuring it from our view. It is an extraordinary experience and slightly intimidating. What a buzz the two in the truck must be getting as the wingspan of one of these birds is nearly as long as the truck!

We soon start to pick up on Lammergeier in the sky in ones and twos, swooping lower over the building and giving us quite unimaginable views. There are one or two Black Vultures as well beginning to show. The vehicle returns and Steve and Marilyn are grinning like Cheshire cats and slightly breathless from the experience! Ricard spots an Egyptian Vulture on the ground and we put the scopes on it. We then realise that we can get all four species of European vulture in the scope at the same time!!! We drag our attention away, briefly to enjoy a Red-billed Chough feeding on the ground, while we listen to the songs of both Orphean Warbler and Woodlark. The cronking of Raven is ubiquitous, Linnets tinkle through and a Black Redstart shows nicely. All the time vultures are overhead and cruising past so low we can hear the air through their wings. They aren't the only raptors we see here. A Honey Buzzard cruises over very high, a Red Kite is hanging around hoping (in vain) to be able to join in the feeding frenzy and some of us get onto an adult Golden Eagle as it crosses the valley at eye level. All-in-all we see 500+ Griffon Vultures, 30-35 Lammergeier, 10+ Black Vultures

and 5 Egyptian Vultures. For our guide Duncan it has been one of the greatest birding experiences of his life.

Jordi is extremely generous and we have enjoyed the experience, company and coffee and as a final gift he gives us a bunch of Lammergeier feathers!

As we drive back down the road we can hear Cirl Bunting and Bonelli's Warbler singing and Ricard gets two Ocellated Lizards on the road ahead. We drive to the entrance to a gorge for lunch and find some shade in which to enjoy it. It is hot down here. There are Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail and Brimstone butterflies on the wing.

It is very warm as we take a windy mountain road to an area that is dry rocky slope. There are Bee-eaters hanging on the air as we get out of the vehicles. They are obviously nesting here. As we scan for Rock Sparrow (our target) we notice that this ridge is good for raptors with two Black Kites, three Red Kites a Booted Eagle and a Short-toed Eagle all showing up! Steve then directs us to a small bird that he has seen land. It is a Rock Sparrow! This little, pale bird is tricky to see, but we get views through the scopes. An Alpine Chough goes over with another Red Kite. What a place!

Another winding mountain road, but this time we get superb views of snowy peaks. We are on the hunt for Rock Thrush and Ricard is the man to know where. We pull up on the side of the narrow road and we scan around. The views just keep on giving. A Common Kestrel appears high above us and Ricard draws our attention to a Golden Oriole singing somewhere below us. Steve finds a Green Hairstreak and then a Firecrest. The Firecrest is not at all obliging so we decide to try a bit of playback. Nothing seems to happen until Jane, almost speechless, directs our attention to the fact that it is right next to us, close enough to stroke! Wow, what a bird.

We park at the end of the road for another scan. Jane finds us a really close Lammergeier then Ricard whoops with joy as he has found a Rock Thrush!! We get it in the scopes and enjoy this striking bird with its rich rufous breast and blue head. What a bird to finish with; what a day! We head back to the hotel elated after an extraordinary day.

**Day 3:** We are treated to another great breakfast and once we have the lunches in the cars we gather to go through the day. The sky is still a clear blue. We are heading up into the high mountains today so we make sure we have warm layers to put on.

We make for the ski resort of Port dera Bonaigua. The road there is a superb experience of hairpins and stunning views. We park up at well over 2,000m and get ourselves sorted. David almost instantly reports that he has seen a Ring Ouzel fly past! Good news – they are here. There are Crag Martins nesting on one of the buildings and it is lovely to get such close views. We walk behind this building

where the views down north are superb and where we start to scan for some of the targets here. We are soon onto a Water Pipit and we get fleeting views as it keeps moving. The Citril Finches, however, are much more obliging, feeding on the short, wet grass right in front of us. There must be six to eight of these smart little finches and the trilling flight call is thrilling to hear. As we walk back to the cars we get superb views of a Ring Ouzel on the ground and flying as well as another Water Pipit. Alpine Choughs are in the air.

The guides have a quick meeting and it is decided to go off itinerary for a while – get us rebels! Ricard knows of a beautiful place in the far northwest corner of Catalunya and it is decided that we will go for it. The drive is not all that long and we drive through absolutely glorious scenery. The village of Bousen is our destination, tucked into a corner of the mountains this village is truly beautiful. We park and go for a walk along a shaded path through oaks. We can hear the familiar bird noises from home – Chaffinch, Great and Blue Tit. At one point Ricard gets us to listen to the sound of a Black Woodpecker. =It isn't too close but as we listen a Black Woodpecker flies over us and off over the valley! There is a little field further on and we explore the edges of this. There is both Whinchat and Stonechat and we hear Short-toed Treecreeper. The field is surrounded by trees. Ricard says he can hear Middle Spotted Woodpecker and we try luring it. We all get flight views of this very difficult woodpecker, some even get perched views. A Wryneck is calling also and we try to lure it in, but no matter how close it comes it stays out of sight. Nuthatch shows well.

We walk back and then through the village the other side. Swifts and House Martins are above us and swallows twitter from overhead wires. We have to watch our step along this path as this obviously the dog walking route of choice! The path takes us out to a small enclosure where there are two graves. Ricard tells us a love story involving the two people buried here, away from the church and not on hallowed ground. From the other side of the enclosure is a stunning view of the valley below.

Our day continues along a high plateau road surrounded by high, snowy peaks. It is windy and cool up here, but still clear and bright. We work our way along this track stopping and scanning, looking for Chamois and anything else that draws our attention. We find little groups of Red Deer, but little else until we reach some pines as the track starts to descend. We park up and have another scan around. We hear Crested Tit and with a bit of patience we get some good views. There are more Red Deer and again we hear a treecreeper. Some beautiful wild flowers keep us occupied with Trumpet and Alpine Gentians, Dogs Tooth Violet and Oxslip all showing rather beautifully. Time is pressing so we start to head for home. We stop one last time just before we descend out of the mountains. We haven't found Chamois and this is our last roll of the dice, so to speak. It is David that comes up with the goods. There are a couple of these smart animals high up along the edge of a snow patch. We get them in the scopes and enjoy good views. Hurrah!

Back at the hotel we have a wonderful dinner, go through the checklist and make plans for the next phase of our adventure through Catalunya, starting tomorrow.

**Day 4:** It is another glorious morning with Dippers and Grey Wagtails on the river along with a Common Sandpiper. We have a final breakfast with this very friendly and helpful hotel before packing the vehicles with our belongings and heading off on the next stage of our adventure.

We are heading south towards the steppes around the city of Lleida, but we have some places to visit before then. Perched beneath a large rock face is the little hamlet of Roc de Benavent. The sun is beating down as we park and walk up the road a little way, watching and listening. Bonelli's Warblers are singing and the ubiquitous sound of Nightingale fills our ears. There is a perched Peregrine high on a branch sticking out from the crag. Griffon Vultures have found air and cruise past over the rock. We hear an Orphean warbler and so slowly make our way closer. With a little bit of play back some of us get great views of this big warbler. Marilyn gets onto a close Red Kite and we enjoy that as it floats by before another raptor is spotted higher. It is a pale Booted Eagle! We can make out the distinct plumage pattern of this diminutive eagle. It always looks long winged though!

We continue down hill (so to speak). The countryside becomes flatter and more agricultural with large fields appearing. Still a few Griffon Vultures in the sky, who said we were going to leave them in the mountains? We head for an area (Font de Queralt) that has the only breeding Lapwing in Catalunya as well as myriad other species. We quickly locate the Lapwing. This is a wonderful mosaic of cultivated and uncultivated land, dry river beds and rocky slope. We find Crested Larks along the track before we park up and scan around. There are three Rollers perched on a distant dead tree and in another tree both Stock and Turtle Doves. Corn Buntings are rattling and Black-winged Stilts are on the little bit of water beneath us. Jane finds us a Marsh Harrier and it floats by as David spots a Black Kite. They are joined in the air by a Common Buzzard, just so we can easily compare them! A second Buzzard wings past putting up the Stilts and Lapwing. With the buzzing of insects, the red poppies and the birds we decide to have our lunch in this beautiful spot.

It is really hotting up now out on the plains of Belianes. There is no shade and the sun is belting down. This is the habitat of some superb species and we take our time driving the rough roads through this extraordinary mix of cereal crop, uncultivated grasslands and crops planted specifically for bird conservation. Ricard stops as he has seen a Lesser Kestrel. We get out and take a look at this raptor that is difficult to separate from Common Kestrel. On the adjacent ruined building is a little group of Tree Sparrows. David's sharp eyes get us onto a stunning male Montagu's Harrier and we enjoy watching him drift by. The sound of Calandra Lark fills the air. We point out the mimicry that they utilise in their repertoire.

A little further on and Jane hits the Jackpot! She has heard then spotted a male Little Bustard (spotter's prize for sure) off to the left of the track. We gingerly get

out of the cars and set up the scopes. We can only see his head and neck, but he is calling – throwing his head back and blowing a high-pitched raspberry! What a bird and great views. David then draws our attention to a Stone Curlew on the other side of the track, trying not to be seen and scuttling low as it tries to lure us away from where it is obviously nesting. Marilyn was really hoping to see one and they don't get much better than this!

Our final stop before finding our hotel is a large freshwater lagoon. We park and take a short walk to view the water. There are plenty of Marsh Harriers in the air and we see some distant White Storks soaring. A Great Reed Warbler is chuntering from the reeds and out on the water we find Mallard and Great Crested Grebe. Further out is a swarm of terns. We go through them and are delighted to find White-winged, Black and Whiskered Tern all together! A great opportunity to go through the id at this distance. Three Glossy Ibis fly in before we relocate to the other side of the lagoon.

We don't have much time here, but we add Cattle Egret, Purple Heron, Night Heron and Bee-eater to our list. What a great place. We make our way to the city of Lleida and locate our hotel by the train station. It is a bit tricky to park and unload, but we manage. It is all a bit strange having been so rural so far, to being in the hubbub of a large city with the traffic noise, sirens and general busyness. As we head for dinner there are both Common and Alpine Swift above the station. The ancient cathedral that looms over the city is home to a considerable colony of common swift. We have some dinner and then contemplate the morning.

**Day 5:** The plains on the other side of the city are home to rare species like sandgrouse and Dupont's Lark and we head to an area where Ricard tells us is a good place for them. We stop and scan, listen and look and although we get both Calandra and Short-toed larks, we do not hear Dupont's. In fact the sound of larks is quite heady.

A Little Bustard flies by and we get to see how duck-like they are in flight. Raptors are up and about with lots of Black Kites, Marsh Harrier and we get good looks at a Short-toed Eagle. Calandra Larks are simply everywhere and we finally get good close views of this large lark. The dark throat line quite obvious. Short-toed Lark we eventually get good views of and is smaller and sandier in colour. Ricard takes us to a place where he says can be good for Little Owl. As soon as we arrive he points one out on the edge of a large rock! Superb. What is this soaring above us? A Griffon Vulture! Definitely leaving them in the mountains!

We drive on to an area where we look down onto a river from dry, rocky slopes with small cultivated areas. We instantly get onto our target bird – Black Wheatear! What a stunning bird. Black with a white tail and is almost endemic to Iberia. We watch it go from perch to perch before losing it. A raptor appears above us and we see a superb adult female Honey Buzzard. What a view. The birds keep on coming. Next up Ricard spots a male Black-eared Wheatear and again it shows

well before moving over the rise. Steve manages to relocate it so everyone gets a view. We can hear Golden Oriole from the river below, but no sign of it. We head towards the river and bag both Thekla (also almost confined to Iberia) and Lesser Short-toed Lark on our way.

Down along the river the trees provide some shade from the relentless heat. We find a ruin to scan across the rocky river valley from. This is a known Eagle Owl site, but there is no sign of this species. Probably the heat. We do get another Black Wheatear, however.

Further along the river valley we stop and scan around. Yet another Black Wheatear makes an appearance. Blue Rock Thrush is obvious by its absence until we start packing up to leave when a male Blue Rock Thrush wings in, over our heads, across the road and lands on the roof of an industrial building! Result!

We have to move on as we have an appointment to keep. We stop at El Colgul where there is a prehistoric site. A Short-toed Eagle comes over before we find a smart Woodchat Shrike perched up. It is locked when we arrive (ominous) but a phone call changes all of that and Anna, the Archaeologist, arrives to let us in to the beautifully cool centre. There are loos and a small interpretive room about the cave and the paintings. Once we are assembled Anna goes through the story of the cave, who found it and when and why it is so significant. She does a great job and it brings up a whole heap of questions from us all about pre-historic Spain and other aspects of ancient ecology. She then takes us out to the cave itself. It is more of a large overhang than a cave and we are glad of the interpretation inside as even with her torch the paintings are extremely faded. It is still a powerful experience knowing how old they are and that people have been here for that length of time. A Southern Scarce Swallowtail wings through and lands very close giving us superb views. A Golden Oriole sings and another pair of Black Wheatears appear on the rock that Anna had pointed out as a preferred perch!

We are offered a room to eat our lunch in and we take up the generosity with relish. It is wonderfully cool in here and lunch is all the better for it. The local olives go down a treat too! We have a little retail therapy here before saying a fond farewell to Anna and head out again for the rest of the day.

We drive to the large Mas de Melons Reserve. This covers a very large area of the garrigues and looks like a set from a spaghetti western! We drive the sandy roads and spot Iberian Grey Shrike on a bush. There are Thekla and Short-toed larks. At a remote sheep ranch there are Red-billed Choughs and Starlings are nesting in the building. A Hoopoe flies past but we fail to relocate it.

We drive through a large area of cultivated and uncultivated steppe. The sound of Calandra Lark again filling the air. As we approach a ploughed field Ricard radios the following car to say that he has two Pin-tailed sandgrouse on the track ahead of him!!! Duncan's vehicle can't really see the birds so he pulls forward up the bank on the left. Wow, there they are! A male and a female are picking their way up the

side of the road. Some of the second vehicle get out to use Ricard's car as a hide from which to photograph. Boy they are close and just so beautiful. Duncan happens to glance along the top of the bank and notices movement. There is another male sandgrouse right next to Ricard's car! Only feet away! We all get a look at this bird as he starts to make his way down the bank and onto the road. They then cross the road and make their way across the open ploughed field, in full view the whole way. five of them!! This is just a completely mind-blowing experience of an incredibly hard bird to see. Later Ricard tells us that he has only seen Pin-tailed Sandgrouse better once – when he ran and caught one!!

We finish in another Nature Reserve that is designated for grassland birds. We can see the city of Lleida from here and it is really close. This is another area where Dupont's Lark breed so we park up and have a listen. Unfortunately the wind has got up making it more difficult. Calandra Lark is the most obvious noise and they are song-fighting above us. Suddenly Ricard gets quite excited and points to Duncan to listen. We cup our hands behind our ears and then, incredibly, we hear the unmistakable song of a Dupont's lark!! What an incredible way to finish an incredible day. The steppes just kept on giving today and we are happy bunnies that make our way back to the city for dinner and bed.

**Day 6:** We are moving on again today and given the breakfast experience with the bus load of Portuguese, we are looking forward to the departure! Ricard has sharp elbows though!

Once loaded, parking paid for and all aboard we make our way out of the city and head south for the final leg of this exploration of the best of Catalunya. Can it get any better than we have already experienced?

We stop by a bend in the river under a large rockface with views back upstream to a nuclear power station. It is a beautiful view (not the power station). There is a Little Egret down on the water's edge and we can hear Rock Sparrows from the other side. We spot some movement and locate some of the sparrows in the scope. A Blue Rock Thrush makes an appearance and we follow that in the scopes as well. Jane and Marilyn pick up on a bright yellow bird flying over the river. It is a male Golden Oriole! Delighted we follow and watch it land and then get it in the scope as it is perched out in the open. What a bird! We find a female here also.

It is not long before we arrive in D'Eltebre and are checking in to our stunning hotel. It has changed a lot since Duncan was last here and all for the better by the looks. We have our lunch under some covered picnic tables in the garden. Ricard informs us that the nest box has Scops Owl in it, there has been a breeding pair of Long-eared Owl in the gardens and the reeds by the pond has breeding Little Bittern! Can the trip get any better? We just think it has.

We have the rest of the afternoon to get to know a little of the amazing Ebro Delta, one of the most bird-rich areas of Europe. Ricard knows this place like the



back of his hand having been involved in the conservation of the delta and species for many years. There is an observation tower at Aufacada and this is where we stop first. From the top we can appreciate the scale of the delta and associated habitats. Channels, lagoons, salt pans, rice fields, reed beds stretch out before us in all directions. We start to pick up on birds – Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Great Egret, Spoonbill, White Stork, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard and Gadwall just some of the 36 species observed from the tower! The highlight species, however, is the Bald Eagle that Ricard spots walking his dog towards the tower! It takes us a while to stop the hilarity!

Our drive continues through a variety of great habitat. At Migjorn we get surrounded by Collared Pratincoles. These stunning birds that look like a cross between a wader and a tern are standing in the fields around us. It is hard to drive off the views are so good. We park up and walk a short distance to some hides where we find Black-tailed Godwit which is a decent find here. Around by the sea we hit a pebbly beach where a Whinchat is perched. There are Ringed Plover poking around the stones and as we head back we find a Stone Curlew hunched down, trying to keep out of sight. We head through the village of Eucaliptus and out to some salt pans. There are waders around and we pick up on Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Knot. We get our first good looks at Audouin's Gulls here. The world's largest colony of this globally rare gull is right here in the delta and they are truly stunning birds. Ricard has been scanning the far shore meticulously and comes up with a Caspian Tern that shows well through the scopes. It pays to look at every bird!

We head back to the hotel for dinner and the checklist happy with our day.

**Day 7:** There is a terrific rainstorm in the early hours of the morning that wakes most of us up. Over breakfast it has pretty much stopped and by the time we collect our lunches and head out the rain has stopped completely, but there is a dark, ominous sky and it is windy. The Penduline Tit's nest in the garden is swinging around like a flag.

Passing a Squacco Heron and some Whiskered Terns fishing on the channel next to the hotel, we head for Encanyissada Lagoon. There is a large heronry here that we want to check out. Blimey there are a lot of herons! Squacco Herons are everywhere including on nests, we find a Night Heron with a beak full of reeds and there is a constant toing and froing of Glossy Ibis. There are Great Egrets, Cattle and Little Egrets and both Purple and Grey Herons fly over to complete the heron haul. David shouts and we get a Little Bittern belting over the lagoon and reeds. David then gets us onto a Hobby as it cruises through. Talking of raptors, a larger bird moves through, against the wind low. We take a good look and realise it is a Honey Buzzard. Battling against the wind, it is migrating north. As we watch it is followed by others and we count six in total of various plumage types.

We move to a raised platform just a couple of hundred metres away and brace ourselves against the wind. Blimey it is strong and cutting, even though the air temperature is warm the wind brings it right down. Another layer is required! We look out over a series of lagoons where Mallard, Gadwall and Red-crested Pochard forage. There are Glossy Ibis absolutely everywhere; we get great views of a handsome male Marsh harrier and a Great Reed Warbler wobbling on its reed in the wind. Over the sound of the wind we hear a Savi's Warbler reeling. Scanning we don't locate it but then Belinda spots a small pale warbler and tries to get us onto it, but it moves. That was it! There are also lots of Flamingos.

At a series of rice fields we scan from the vehicles, so as not to get blown away. There are a few hunkered birds, mainly Whiskered Tern (aren't they just gorgeous, that smokey grey and black belly), Slender-billed Gulls and Coots. We then drive a sandy track to Alfacs Bay where there is quite a setup for nice days. There is a large platform, like a stage, from which we can scan. The mountains inland are obscured by cloud and the wind is whipping white horses on the sea. There are some distant Flamingos when Ricard spots a Shag. The Mediterranean race here is paler with a narrower, thinner beak almost like a cross between a diver and an Anhinga! David spots a flock of waders coming past and we find it comprises Sanderling, Dunlin and Redshank.

At the SEO (Birdlife partner) Reserve at Rietbell we park up and walk out to a hide. Is the wind calming down? We settle in the hide and realise that there are swallows nesting in the hide! They come and go to their nests as we enjoy Greenshank, Coot, Moorhen, Black-winged Stilt, Mallard and Purple Gallinule. Raptors are represented by three Black Kites. Back at the cars we get talking to the Reserve warden who tells us about the intricate management of water levels and how influential this is to the ecology. David finds us a very tired Pied Flycatcher on the pavement alongside the Reserve building.

The hotel is close, so we decide to eat lunch there and have facilities at hand. This we do and then we go looking for the Long-eared Owls that have nested in the garden. It is not long before we are enjoying superb views of both adults! Stonking owls, truly beautiful.

We drive north to Fangar Bay stopping along the way at various spots to scan around to look. We find Whiskered Terns as well as Common and Little Terns are plenty. At one location we find three second winter Slender-billed terns, quite different from the adults. Amongst a group of loafing terns we find a Sandwich Tern alongside a large group of Grey Plover. Kentish Plovers are scuttling around the foreshore when Ricard comes up trumps with an Oystercatcher. This is not an easy bird to see, here on the western shore of the Med.

We drive through the tourist town of Ampolla and park up at the edge of an unfinished development where there is scrubby habitat overlooking the sea and views back to the delta. We walk down to the edge of the cliffs and scan around. There are huge numbers of swifts and House Martins around and we soon pick

up on a couple of Pallid Swifts. This is a great opportunity to go through the identification features of both swifts, especially as they are in silhouette. A Blue Rock Thrush shows well and we get Goldfinch and Sardinian Warbler. Ricard, scanning out to sea, spots a line of raptors low over the sea. We get on them and realise they are Honey Buzzards migrating north and making the most of the up drafts from the waves. Good luck Honey Buzzards, maybe they are heading to the UK.

Back at the hotel we have some down time before meeting up and going through the final checklist and magic moments. David, on asking, hasn't had a magic moment, but says he might if we find Red-necked Nightjar tonight! Gosh, it is cold and windy, but hey, nothing ventured nothing gained. After a delicious meal we go out and have a look for the Scops Owl. Duncan scratches the tree and almost immediately a tiny wee owl pops out and has a look at us! Absolutely gorgeous. Those of us that then want to go on to look for nightjars load up and we head out. We don't have to drive far! As soon as we hit the sandy track there is a Red-necked Nightjar sitting in the track. Within a few hundred metres we count 16, some of which don't move from the track. Keith has quite a conversation with one! We can get within feet of these gorgeous birds and get great photos and it is quite simply a magic moment!! David is jumping up and down with excitement!

**Day 8:** We have to leave Catalunya today, so we enjoy our breakfast even more! We arrange with the hotel that we can leave our luggage in our rooms while we go out for the morning. We head out to the mouth of the river. There is a platform that we can scan from and it is not long before Ricard says he has a new species for the trip. A Curlew! Again, this is a good species to find here. We also find Balearic Shearwater out at sea.

We head back to the hotel to collect our luggage and bid the staff a fond farewell. We drive north and find somewhere to have lunch before getting to the airport. Ricard knows of a place and we park up in Parc de Llobregat where there are fields and woodland to scan through. We eat our lunch with Monk Parakeets on the trees around us along with super views of Bee-eater. We hear Great Spotted, Iberian and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers while eating our huge baguettes.

We drive our final journey to Barcelona Airport where we say our fond farewells to Ricard. What an absolute gem this man is. We have really enjoyed his company and benefited from his encyclopaedic mind. Thank you Ricard for your generosity, care, knowledge and humour.

We check in and have an easy flight home to London where we say our farewells, hoping to see one another again on another tour, to another destination. Thank you all for such a fantastic trip; for laughter and fun and shared experiences.

**Species of the Trip:** A two way split between Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and Red-necked Nightjar with other votes for all vultures and Middle Spotted Woodpecker.

**Place of the Trip:** The high Pyrenees comes out tops with it's multitude of experiences with El Colgul second.

**Magic Moment:**The Red-necked Nightjars and vulture experience came out tops with Pin-tailed Sandgrouse coming close.

## SPECIES LIST

Little Grebe  
Great Crested Grebe  
Balearic Shearwater  
Cormorant  
Shag (*desmarestii*)  
Little Bittern  
Night heron  
Cattle Egret  
Squacco Heron  
Little Egret  
Great Egret  
Grey Heron  
Purple Heron  
White Stork  
Glossy Ibis  
Spoonbill  
Greater Flamingo  
Mute swan  
Shelduck  
Mallard  
Gadwall  
Shoveler  
Red-crested Pochard  
Lammergeier  
Griffon Vulture  
Black Vulture  
Egyptian Vulture  
Golden Eagle  
Short-toed Eagle  
Booted Eagle  
Bonelli's Eagle  
Red Kite  
Black Kite  
Marsh Harrier  
Montagu's Harrier  
Common Buzzard  
Honey Buzzard  
Common Kestrel  
Lesser Kestrel  
Hobby  
Peregrine  
Red-legged Partridge  
Pheasant  
Water Rail  
Moorhen  
Coot  
Purple Gallinule  
Little Bustard  
Oystercatcher  
Avocet  
Black-winged Stilt  
Stone-Curlew  
Collared Pratincole  
Little Ringed Plover  
Ringed Plover  
Kentish Plover  
Grey Plover  
Lapwing  
Knot  
Sanderling  
Turnstone  
Dunlin  
Curlew Sandpiper  
Little Stint  
Wood Sandpiper  
Common Sandpiper  
Redshank  
Greenshank  
Black-tailed Godwit  
Curlew  
Black-headed Gull  
Slender-billed Gull  
Mediterranean Gull  
Yellow-legged Gull  
Audouin's Gull  
Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Little Tern  
Sandwich Tern  
Gull-billed Tern  
Common Tern  
Caspian Tern  
Black Tern  
White-winged Tern  
Whiskered Tern  
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse  
Stock Dove  
Wood Pigeon  
Collared Dove  
Turtle Dove  
Common Cuckoo  
Long-eared Owl  
Little Owl

Scops Owl  
Red-necked Nightjar  
Common Swift  
Pallid Swift  
Alpine Swift  
Hoopoe  
Bee-eater  
Roller  
Monk Parakeet  
Black Woodpecker  
Iberian Woodpecker  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Middle Spotted Woodpecker  
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker  
Wryneck  
Crested Lark  
Thekla Lark  
Woodlark  
Short-toed Lark  
Lesser Short-toed lark  
Calandra Lark  
Dupont's lark (heard only)  
Sand Martin  
Crag Martin  
Barn Swallow  
Red-rumped Swallow  
House Martin  
Water Pipit  
White Wagtail  
Yellow Wagtail  
Grey Wagtail  
Wren  
Dipper  
Dunnock  
Robin  
Nightingale  
Black Redstart  
Northern Wheatear  
Black-eared Wheatear  
Black Wheatear  
Whinchat  
Stonechat  
Mistle Thrush  
Blackbird  
Ring Ouzel  
Blue Rock Thrush  
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush

Garden Warbler  
Blackcap  
Western Orphean Warbler  
Sardinian Warbler  
Moustached Warbler (heard only)  
Zitting Cisticola  
Savi's Warbler  
Cetti's Warbler  
European Reed Warbler  
Great Reed Warbler  
Melodious Warbler  
Western Bonelli's Warbler  
Common Chiffchaff  
Willow Warbler  
Goldcrest  
Firecrest  
Spotted Flycatcher  
Pied Flycatcher  
Great Tit  
Coal Tit  
Blue Tit  
Crested Tit  
Long-tailed Tit  
Bearded Reedling  
Penduline Tit  
Nuthatch  
Short-toed Treecreeper (heard only)  
Iberian Grey Shrike  
Red-backed Shrike  
Woodchat Shrike  
Magpie  
Jay  
Jackdaw  
Red-billed Chough  
Alpine Chough  
Carrion Crow  
Hooded Crow  
Raven  
Common Starling  
Spotless Starling  
Golden Oriole  
House Sparrow  
Tree Sparrow  
Rock Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Linnet  
Goldfinch

Greenfinch  
Citril Finch  
Serin  
Bullfinch  
Witherby's Reed Bunting  
Yellowhammer  
Cirl Bunting  
Corn Bunting

## **MAMMALS**

Rabbit  
Red Deer  
Roe Deer  
Southern Chamois  
Red Fox

## **AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES**

Wall Lizard  
Ocellated Lizard  
Florida Terrapin

## **BUTTERFLIES**

Swallowtail  
Scarce Swallowtail  
Southern Scarce Swallowtail  
Brimstone  
Clouded Yellow  
Cleopatra  
Large White  
Small White  
Southern Small White  
Speckled Wood  
Comma  
Brown Argus  
Green Hairstreak  
Orange Tip  
Wall Brown  
Red Admiral  
Painted Lady  
Small Tortoiseshell  
Small Heath  
Glanville Fritillary  
Adonis Blue  
Small Copper  
Nettle Tree Butterfly  
Peacock

## **DRAGONFLIES**

Lesser Emperor  
Emperor  
Black-tailed Skimmer  
Large Red Damselfly