

Holiday Highlights  
Predators of South East Spain  
7 – 15 February 2018

Guide: Julian Sykes

Guests: Joyce and Tony Sawford, Charles Gordon, Hazel and Andrew Fardell, Sue Ripley, Marilyn Davidson

Day 1: Sue arrives into Alicante Airport and is met by Julian, with the rest of the group landing ahead of schedule about an hour later. We are soon loading the minibus and heading towards the coastal town of Santa Pola, to the 'salinas' on the southern edge. As we drop down towards the first of the salt pans we can easily see lots of Greater Flamingos, but Julian sees another small group of birds on the water and quickly pulls over. He checks these and announces "Three White-headed Duck with a Black-necked Grebe – welcome to Spain!" We all jump out of the bus and from the edge of the salt pan we can easily see this group of birds, containing one of the rarest breeding ducks in Europe. As always in these situations we start to also scan the rest of the pool and find more Black-necked Grebes plus Shoveler, Common Pochard, Grey Heron, Black-headed and Western Yellow-legged Gulls with lots of Crag Martins hawking insects – great start.

Eventually we drag ourselves away and follow this main road through the heart of this active salt producing area to a lay-by that we pull into. This is because Julian hopes to find a Slender-billed Gull (one of the specialities) and the first bird we see is a gorgeous adult. Out of the minibus again and Julian sets up his scope but this tasty larid has drifted closer and looks fabulous through the binoculars. We scan around and see a Common Redshank, followed by Marilyn spotting a few more with the Greenshank. There are 100's more Greater Flamingos here but our guide now gets a little excited as there is an Osprey sat on a post in the distance – not always an easy bird to find here. Again we move on passing more and more saline pools with loads more flamingos plus a couple of Sanderling, Marilyn sees our first Black-winged Stilts and we add Shelduck to the list. Our final Santa Pola Salinas stop involves much the same species but we do manage to add a distant Iberian Grey Shrike, Sardinian Warbler and Stonechat to the list.

It is now lunchtime and Julian is keen to get to our picnic spot at the Visitor Centre of El Hondo Natural Park, which takes about 15 minutes. It is very enjoyable in the bright sunshine, passing bizarre garden centres for olive trees and several date palm groves. Eventually we turn off the main road to the track leading to the reserve centre, where we park up, collect the lunches and walk the short distance to the picnic tables. Julian knows this place well and checks a nearby small pool and there amongst the much commoner Coots he finds a pair of Red-knobbed Coots – his target species for this place! We start to quip that

he has an app on his phone to release these things just before we arrive! Once we have seen the coot, which are lovely, we enjoy a delicious picnic lunch and just what are ready for. Joyce is sat nonchalantly enjoying her 'bocadillo' when she calmly says "there are some Red Crested Pochard here" pointing at the small pool we are sat next too. They look superb, with the bright sunshine illuminating their orange heads and bright red bills. Then Charles says "I can see a Bluethroat" and points towards an open area where a handsome male is strutting about – we cannot believe it. Once we are replete Julian suggests a stroll around the boardwalk trail behind the centre, which starts brilliantly with fabulous views of some close Purple Swamphens, along with Common Snipe, Common Sandpiper, Little Grebe and lots of Chiffchaff in the tamarisk. This walk does take a wee while, but quite productive and as we get to the drier area we get a brief view of Dartford Warbler along with several Glossy Ibis dropping into an adjacent wet field. Julian is now conscious of the time being late afternoon and says we need to use the facilities and leave for our final site.

It is a short drive round to Catral and a winding route has us eventually stopping on the edge of another part of this huge wetland, surrounded by acres of reedbed. There is a tower platform here and we are informed this is where we will spend the next hour or so, watching the raptors. As we get there we can already see several Marsh Harriers in the air along with Common Buzzard and a Kestrel sat in a tree. We climb up the stairs to the platform, which affords fantastic views over the whole area, most of which is phragmites bed. Initially we are seeing mainly Marsh Harriers but Andrew also spots another pale larger bird that Julian identifies as another Osprey. There is a distant Booted Eagle but that's difficult to make out, although the wing shape is definitely different to both Marsh Harrier and Common Buzzard. Things are getting a little quiet when Charles says "what's this flying past?" and Julian almost immediately replies "Little Bittern – wow that's brilliant. This is because they should not be here in winter, being a migrant from Africa, usually arriving later in the season.

We continue to search the skies, finding incredibly a third Osprey for the day, which is amazing but no Greater Spotted Eagle, which is our main target. It is getting close to our leaving time and Julian suggests we start to pack up when he turns round and sees a few Marsh Harriers surrounding Tonn – our adult Greater Spotted Eagle. It is an awesome look at this huge aquila eagle, that's wintered here for the past eight years being constantly radio-tracked from its birth place in Estonia. We watch this huge predator rise up from the reedbed and circle up into the blue sky, occasionally being mobbed by the harriers but they soon disperse. However as its high overhead a pale phase Booted Eagle comes in and seriously mobs it, showing the massive size comparison between these raptors – just brilliant. However it is time to go.

We get back to the minibus and set off on our long drive to the accommodation, which is set in the heart of the Muela de Cortes Natural Reserve. For most of the journey it is motorway and most of us catch up on some sleep (except our driver thank goodness!). But as we head through Engura and the road becomes more

rural, we focus on our surroundings. The sun is now dipping behind the horizon, with Hazel and Tony commenting on how beautiful it looks, when Sue says "there's some deer?". Julian immediately thinks Fallow, by their size and rear end coloration but quickly changes his mind once he's reversed and can see them properly – Spanish Ibex. It is a small group of females and young males, showing very short horns but with a typical goat-like appearance. Our luck is certainly in today and this is compounded by getting a brief view of a (grey) Red Fox just before reaching our lovely rural hotel, with a fantastic red glow in the west – bringing a perfect day to an end.

**Day 2:** It is a beautiful sunrise over the Sierra de Muerta de Cortes as we enjoy a very good and wholesome breakfast in this lovely rustic accommodation. We are full of anticipation for the day's main event – looking for European Genet later this evening! After breakfast we set off a little after 9am as we are loath to leave these wonderful surroundings, especially with Sardinian Warbler, Black Redstart and Chaffinches in the grounds. We are first driving the minor track through to Navarres. As Julian wants to make sure it's clear and safe after the recent rainfall and initially it's just like a decent unmetalled road. In fact apart from a couple of places the whole route through is fine and we are stopped for a huge flock of Chaffinches, Mistle Thrush, Jay and a few Woodlarks sat on overhead lines. We have noted the route as we reach Navarres and head out of the valley to the motorway on this glorious but pretty chilly day.

We travel through extensive agricultural lands of mainly oranges, but also almond, vine, olive and persimmon, which is a new crop being developed here in the Valencia Region. Eventually we reach the edge of Spain's third largest city – Valencia and along the southern edge we now go south and start to see the famous flooded ricefields of this area. There are also birds now with lots of Cattle Egrets, Black-headed, Lesser Black-backed and Western Yellow-legged Gulls, Spotless and European Starlings, Moorhen, etc. Andrew sees our first Great White Egret and we pull off the road for a look and also see our first Marsh Harrier.

We now carry on driving these narrow roads, adjacent to the coast until we reach the small Reserve of Raco d'Olla. Here we get our warm clothes on, even though the sun is pretty strong, and walk straight to the Visitor Centre with a party of school children just leaving – how lucky! In here we make our way up the tower to the viewing area over to the main lake of the Albufera d'Valencia. A telescope is needed and thankfully we have a few between us as we scan the water, initially finding 100's of Red Crested Pochard, Mallard and Shoveler. There are a few Shelduck but Julian spots a Pintail, followed by several more seen by Tony and near these are a few Wigeon, which is new to the list. There are Marsh Harriers everywhere, along with Great Cormorant, Grey Heron and Crag Martins around the tower. We are adjacent to a small pool with much lesser numbers of the commoner ducks on but beyond Joyce and Marilyn see a cloud of pink as 100's of Greater Flamingos take to the air, making a wonderful sight as they circle round. These birds settle back into this distant pond and completely obscure the water

as there are so many! Our guide now spots a couple of Black-winged Stilts quite close and it's good to get a decent view of these, having only seen them from the van previously. It is now fairly warm in the direct sunshine and there are lots of raptors around with a Kestrel and then in the distance a couple of Booted Eagles of both light and dark phase, which is great for comparison.

Another party of school children have now turned up and it's a case of 'exit stage left' as we have seen what we need too and a quick drive into El Palmar is required. We leave the centre and walk slowly back to the vehicle, setting off towards this small town that claims to be the 'Home of Paella'. Julian quickly finds the restaurant recommended to him and goes inside to make a reservation, which is no problem at all for about 1pm. We still have some time so drive out on to the extensive ricefields with its network of roads and tracks all looking very similar.

Along the route we continually see herons, egrets, gulls and cormorants but Andrew spots some Greater Flamingos ahead of us and on we go for a better look. Here we stay watching and photographing these lovely birds until it's time for lunch, with us also seeing several more Marsh Harriers, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat and lots of House Sparrows. With plenty of time we head back to the village and go for a gastronomic feast of tapas, paella and dessert – we will be all asleep this afternoon!

After lunch we are back in the minibus and again out on to the ricefields, with us heading this time towards the eastern edge. We spot a few Lapwing in one muddy field along with just a few Dunlin but a Kingfisher flashes by, which looks to disappear. However the eagle-eyed Hazel spots it silhouetted in the distance and we get some pretty good views through the telescope, even with it into the sun. In the distance here we can also see a murmuration of dark birds and Julian says they are Glossy Ibis, which is incredible and he then suggests we go and try to find them. He negotiates his way through the fields, always keeping in the right direction towards Perello and after about 15 minutes we can see the huge flocks of Glossy Ibis, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls. We manage to park without disturbing these flocks and opposite a field of waders that we scan while staying in the van. There are lots of Lapwing, Dunlin and Golden Plover but also a few Black-tailed Godwit, which we don't want to flush as not everyone in the bus can see them. A Booted Eagle flies over sending all the birds we can see up into the air with the Glossy Ibis looking absolutely spectacular as they wheel round together. The waders have moved a little further away so out of the bus we get and now have a good scope look at the few godwits. Julian has seen another field with lots of waders and creeps round to check them, only to find a whole huge flock of Black-tailed Godwits along with some Ruff. There we are trying desperately not to disturb the original three or four when there are 100's just behind us! Our guide is very conscious of the time and knows that we don't want to be late into the Muela de Cortes Natural Park. So we leave the excellent Albufera d'Valencia.

The sat nav is on and it skilfully takes us round the best roads back to the motorway and then out towards Enguera, turning off just before this exit. We now head into the mountains, through quaint villages and good, winding roads until we go off-piste into the Reserve and the road turns into a decent track – it has clearly been improved since Julian was last here. The drive through the forest is pretty quiet generally but Julian tells us to be vigilant as we pass a small olive grove as there are sometimes Spanish Ibex – and there is, just a few young ones but still a good mammal to start with. The rough track continues and does deteriorate a little as we get close to the casita, where we are hoping to see European Genet. We park with about 300m still to walk down this steep hill but it's okay in the light – could be interesting coming back though in the dark! We get to the bottom and see our Spanish colleague in his garden and cross the small river to get to where he is. Julian and Javi greet each other like old friends and then we are introduced to this quirky but charming young man, whose life revolves around conservation and his very rural house. We are given translated instructions by Julian on what to (possibly) expect and what to do (or not to do) should an animal show up. The temperature is now falling rapidly as the sun drops behind the mountain top and the only bird we see is a couple of Raven that fly over. The light starts to fade entirely now and silence ensues, as does movement – this is it the start of our vigil for Genet and it could be some time!

After about 20 minutes, Julian whispers “it's there – on the right” but we don't initially see it in the dark (he obviously eats a lot of carrots) but then Javi shines a beam and in the semi-light of the torch we see the movement then the whole, wonderful animal. We cannot believe our luck as this gorgeous cat-like mammal, a European Genet is literally 3m away feeding on the sardines left out by our host – what an absolute thrill and nothing really prepared us for this moment. We continue to watch and attempt photography, mesmerised by this beautiful, nocturnal animal for the best part of 45 minutes before it left into the dark. Our smiles are immense, both broad and wide.

Javi asks if we would like tea and that is readily accepted and when he produces hot water stuffed with rosemary we are a little sceptical but ‘in for a penny. We have it with honey and it is delicious, along with some of our picnic we had carried to the house but very few of us are hungry after the huge lunchtime meal. After a while Julian suggests we leave as we still have a fair drive back to the hotel and we dig out our own torches, walk down to stream and tentatively (but very successfully) cross the stepping stones. There are some toads in the water that Javi says are Western Spadefoot, which is an amphibian some of us had never even heard of but they are lovely. We now say “thank you and goodbye” to Javi and walk slowly up the steep hill, which is not easy but we all make it safely and in one piece.

We climb back into the minibus and drive slowly out of the Park to the main road and down to our return to the tracks at Navarres. This again is mostly devoid of any wildlife until we nearly reach the end when an Iberian Hare is seen and runs along the track in full view of the headlights allowing all some kind of view,

even those in the back. This rounds off a fantastic and very memorable day in the Valencia Region, with the Genet sighting still very much in our minds as we head to our rooms for some sleep.

**Day 3:** It is another glorious morning, but still very cold as we go for breakfast with some of us already having been outside for a walk round the lovely grounds. Today we are heading to Castilla La Mancha and by 9am we are on our way to the motorway and then heading west. As we climb up into this new region the whole topography of the landscape changes, with extensive fields of vines of old cereal crops stretching over huge distances. Eventually we reach the motorway services on the edge of the Bonete exit and call in to use the facilities and to allow Julian to fill-up the minibus. There is a stiff cold wind and now being much higher than even Casas de Benali we notice the biting cold even more.

We now leave the motorway and take the road through to Corral Rubio, soon turning off on to a farm track where we quickly find our first Calandra Larks and a flock of Linnets in the adjacent field. A little further we watch a Common Buzzard and Carrion Crows in the distance before a pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse take off and fly past the front of the van. Another pair does this but a wee bit closer, allowing us all to see their rotund bodies and the diagnostic black bellies, which is great. We continue along this track until we can easily turn round and just as we do Andrew spot a couple more larks nearby, which are clearly Thekla Larks, by their short stubby bills, punk-style crest and much colder grey tone to the plumage – another excellent start to the day.

Back at the main road we continue slowly towards Corral Rubio, seeing Red-legged Partridge, Goldfinches, Magpies, Meadow Pipit and two cracking Hoopoes in the middle of the road! At a farm we pull off the road and get the full experience of this incredible area, where the fields and mountains are a kaleidoscope of colours, which are just breath-taking. Julian spots something in the distance and through the telescope confirms them as Great Bustards, but they are a long way off. This is then followed by another 'dot bird' as he now finds a Little Owl on top of a pile of rocks, obviously closer than the bustards but it's a tenth of the size. So our guide is determined not to disappoint and walks up to the ridge and scans another set of huge fields, where he finds a dozen more much closer and more significantly near another farm track. We all take a quick look as Andrew and Julian marvel at a massive domestic cat moving towards the farm buildings – what a beast! Our plan is to drive slowly down the track and stay in the minibus as not to spook the bustards and this is executed very well and we marvel at these majestic and very handsome steppe birds as they walk slowly out of sight – just awesome. The track is narrow and turning will be difficult so Julian effortlessly backs out to the main road and on we drive. It is not long before we are stopping again opposite a seasonal pool, where we find lots of Shoveler, Mallard along with a few Eurasian Teal, but according to our guide the water levels are really low. This is then confirmed as a second pool on the edge of Corral Rubio is almost dry and has even less on there, which is very unusual.

We continue through the village and take another unmetalled farming road, where we see our first Marsh Harrier along with Crested Larks, Corn Bunting and more finch flocks as we travel along – but it's fairly quiet. Another pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse fly away from us and we are getting slightly frustrated we haven't found any on the ground yet. A little further we stop for a lads comfort break and as we get back in the bus Julian sees a large raptor ahead and calls "Golden Eagle" then drives quickly along the road to get us a better view. We get superb views of this first year Goldie, as it climbs up from the field being mobbed by crows and right over the bus, we cannot believe our luck. Once it's out of sight we continue the slow drive, seeing lots more of the same species with fabulous looks at 100s of Calandra Larks, Corn Buntings, Linnets and Goldfinches as it heads towards lunchtime. Julian has a plan to loop round and go to Petrola Lagoon for lunch but we are again stopped as there is another small group of Great Bustards in the field, followed then by Joyce seeing another two pairs of Black-bellied Sandgrouse in flight but these are looking to land. Thankfully they do and we set up the telescopes and get a very good look at them feeding on the bare earth – it is amazing how they just look like rocks when settled. A proper comfort stop has been requested by most of us so into the town of Petrola we now go, stopping at the local petrol station. There is only one facility so we spend our time wondering what type of place this is as they also only sell, motor equipment and pet food, including ferrets!

It is now lunchtime and to try and escape the cold wind we go to Petrola Lagoon, where we walk down to the (very Spanish) hide and have our delicious salad, cheese, ham and cake. The lagoon looks pretty deserted but Andrew and Tony are keen to try and find something so they brave the elements and scope the edges with some success, including some very nice drake Pintail amongst the Shoveler, Teal, Shelduck and Mallard. However as it is so quiet we decide to leave and drive along the edge of the shallow salinated lake, getting a poor view of an Iberian Shrike and a decent view of a Water Pipit but not much else.

Julian explains his plan for the rest of the afternoon, which is basically back-tracking somewhat and heading out to another deeper roadside lagoon – seems fair enough! We start back again turning off the main road to Corral Rubio on to yet another farm track that also leads through to this one-horse town (where you never see any inhabitants!). We now get a much better view of an Iberian Shrike on an overhead power-line and a couple of Red-legged Partridge show really well as they scurry across the front of the van. We are looking and searching continually as we negotiate this network of roads when Charles nonchalantly says "Oh look a Golden Eagle on the ground" and sure enough there is. However it is not on the ground but stood on a sheep carcass, surrounded by Carrion Crows and a Raven, which still looked tiny next to it. Sadly though this massive avian predator takes off immediately as we stop and flies up right in front of us. It looks incredible, being almost piebald in its first year plumage with large bright white wing patches – nothing like the first immature Goldie we had seen – absolutely brilliant. Once it's out of sight we climb back into the vehicle and

complete our short journey to La Higuera, seeing both Marsh Harrier and Kestrel along the way.

At this deeper fresh water lagoon we are not disappointed as we immediately see a large flock of Gadwall, which is another new duck species to the list. There are four Greater Flamingos, the usual wildfowl suspects and also a group of Common Pochard, a few each of Eurasian Wigeon and Red Crested Pochard – definitely well worth the visit. It is now late afternoon and Julian has one last site where we might find the 'hoped-for' target of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse but you never know!

Off we go back towards Bonete, stopping along the way for another look at some Great Bustards before turning off to Higuera. We are scanning constantly the fields and trying little side roads without success until Julian sees another four Great Bustards in the distance, which makes 41 for the day – not a bad total. He has one last track and initially we again see good numbers of Calandra Lark but then Joyce and Julian spot the same shapes on the edge of a dip in to the rolling field and the words "Pin-tailed Sandgrouse" is excitedly spoken. In the afternoon light and not too far away we get tremendous looks at these gorgeous step birds before they walk slowly out of sight. Tony and Marilyn comment on how this is the best view of this species they have ever had, having seen them in flight and at distance in Extremadura, years earlier and it is again a fabulous end to our day out.

Julian suggests a hot drink stop that is very well received and just outside Bonete we pull into another motorway services with an associated café. Sue very kindly takes the mantle as translator as Julian needs to clean the bus somewhat after getting it covered in red mud and dirt but soon joins us. Once we are all ready we set off back to the accommodation, about an hour away and arrive as the sun is setting in the west and illuminating the valley again. We have plenty of time before dinner to freshen up and in fact manage to complete the checklist before settling down to another fantastic meal, made from locally grown fresh produce. It is fairly late when we have finished and with a long drive tomorrow it is not long before we are heading to our rooms for a good night's sleep.

**Day 4:** It has been an interesting night with strong winds battering the hotel with some of us not having such a great night's sleep. However we convene for our final breakfast at the usual time of 8am and enjoying this very much. Our planned departure is an hour later and we easily make this deadline, even with Julian having to repack the minibus, so everything will fit properly. We say "thank you and goodbye" to Daniel, who's worked tirelessly to look after us and provide some really delicious cuisine.

We set off on our long journey to La Iruela in the Sierra de Cazorla, which will take more than 5 hours, without any stops. The drive is easy as we drop down to the motorway and head again towards Albacete but as we arrive at Almansa we turn off for Hellín. It is a quiet journey through the pseudo-steppe of this area and after a quick comfort stop we continue through to Elche de la Sierra for



a very welcome hot drinks break. It is actually getting towards midday as we leave here and Julian has assigned Andrew with the road map just to make sure he keeps on the right road. This is done both easily and quicker than expected as we travel through Siles up towards the 'Nacimiento del Rio Mundo' (source of the World River) where we hope to have our picnic lunch. This is somewhat thwarted as the minor road is closed due to snow and ice, plus there are lots of people here so on we decide to drive.

Tony (our co-pilot for the day) spots a likely place and we pull in but also realise it's probably private ground – still we tough it out! At the table we unload the picnic and in the now quite warm sunshine we enjoy our potato omelette butties, cake and fruit – delicious. We are not seeing any birds though until Julian points out our first Griffon Vultures of the tour, flying high overhead. This is then followed by a few Chaffinches and a Grey Heron seen by Andrew and Tony.

Once the lunch is finished we set off again, as the view across to the snow-capped mountains of the high Sierra Nevadas is spectacular along with the nearer mountains of Cazorla adding to this fantastic seen. We eventually drop back on to the main road and wonder at the miles and miles of Olive trees, set out in neat rows, making it look like some patchwork quilt. As mono-cultures go this has to be one of the worst in Europe, thank goodness they support a reasonable amount of wildlife. The sight of Cazorla is ahead as we pass alongside a small 'charco' (man-made pool) where we see some wildfowl – a debate ensues and a return shows there are several Common Pochard and a few Common Coot – nice to see something different. Eventually we reach the Cazorla valley and we start to negotiate the 'one road in' up to La Iruela where our accommodation is situated. This takes longer than expected through the narrow streets but we get there safely and Julian goes inside the restaurant/bar to find out about the rooms. He soon appears with a handful of keys and we set about unloading the minibus but we are here only one night so unpacking the whole suitcase is not necessary. In fact our guide would like us to go up for a couple of hours on to the 'Parque Natural – Sierra de Cazorla for the last couple of hours of daylight.

A meeting time is arranged and Julian gets there early along with Andrew and together they spot a male Peregrine Falcon on the opposite limestone crag, which is a great start. Once we are all together we set off up the mountain into the 'natural park' stopping very soon as there is a small group of Spanish Ibex on the hillside, which includes our first good male with some decent horns. After the obligatory photos are taken we are back in the minibus and climbing further up to the 'Puerta de Paloma' watchpoint, with fantastic views down the valley. There are a few more Griffon Vultures flying around along with another group of Spanish Ibex feeding under a Holm Oak. There is not much else so we decide to move on as we would like to give ourselves a chance of Lammergeier tonight. So Julian winds our way through the Park climbing all the time past the 'source of Spain's longest river – Guadalquivir up through some ice and snow to the 'Mirador de Poyos de Mesa' where we set up our scopes and scan the opposite

limestone crag. We start to see a few more vultures and Ravens until Julian says he has found another Peregrine Falcon, mobbing a Griffon Vulture, which is brilliant. We continue to watch the ridge seeing more vultures coming in to roost and Andrew seeing a couple of Mistle Thrushes and amongst the nearby trees we can hear Crested Tit, Blue and Coal Tits but it's difficult to see them. Our guide now says "Golden Eagle displaying!" as he points out this wonderful predator flying up and diving down in their distinctive and wonderful flight – what a treat! In fact we watch this eagle and his mate over the next 20 minutes flying around and causing havoc amongst the local Ravens who want them to depart their territory – fascinating. A flock of distant Red-billed Chough are seen wheeling about over the cliff but they look like wee dots and hopefully we will get better looks on the Sierra de Andujar.

It is now late afternoon and Julian has thoughts of leaving when Marilyn says "is this another Ibex?" and Julian quickly realises they are in fact a couple of fabulous male Mouflon, complete with superb horns and male bits, much to the amusement of Joyce! We watch these sheep for another 30 minutes before they disappear back into the pine and Holm Oak forest, which heralds our departure and drive back down the mountain. Soon enough we reach our hotel and go to freshen up ahead of our dinner later on. We have been slightly spoilt the past three nights and this is basic (but wholesome) in comparison but we enjoy it and the excellent conversation that we have developed over the past few days as a group. It has been another good day despite being mostly a travelling one and fairly quiet for much of the time.

**Day 5:** After our 8am breakfast we are off for a morning on the Sierra de Cazorla and it is yet another glorious day. Andrew is keen and early on finds a male Blackcap from the dining room window, followed by our first Grey Wagtail of the trip. We set off after Julian has again washed the van, which is still caked in mud under the wheel arches from our 'plains day out'. Our plan is to return to the 'mirador' of Puerta de Palomas and the views are again spectacular in the early morning sunshine. However there is very little bird-life around apart from a few Chaffinches, followed by Julian spotting a couple of young Spanish Ibex, which is great.

After about 30 minutes we decide to move on, failing to locate any of the 'hoped-for' targets but soon stop as Hazel, whose riding shotgun sees some small birds on the adjacent bank. These are mostly more Chaffinches but there is also a gorgeous Rock Bunting creeping around the light scree. We cannot park on this corner and Julian pulls forward a little and sees a couple more birds at the side of the road – he cannot believe it and says excitedly "Alpine Accentor!" and we get a good look before they fly down the banking. We now manage to pull into a wee lay-by and get out, setting up the telescopes. Julian quickly relocates the Alpine Accentors and we all now get very good views of them, before checking out the Long-tailed and Coal Tits in the nearby pines. Andrew looks for the Rock Bunting and spies two birds in a nearby tree, which turn out to be a male Rock Bunting and another new bird – a female Cirl Bunting, but sadly the

latter flies off before we manage to get a good view. Marilyn is also scanning and asks our guide to identify a small, striped bird, which Julian claims is a Rock Sparrow and we can get some good looks as they feed on the ground. We cannot understand our luck as now a Greenfinch drops in to join these other species, followed Hazel spotting a couple of Griffon Vultures, flying low through the limestone valley. It has been an incredibly good and productive stop but Julian is keen to press on as it is now starting to warm up – raptor time!

We drive on past the 'Nacimiento de Rio Guadalquivir' (source of the river) up towards the watchpoint we were at the previous day, spotting a Red Squirrel in the road that then runs up a tree adjacent to the van and disappears. The road is again covered in a thin layer of snow and some ice but it is easily manageable for the minibus, which is great as Julian decides to press on to Nava de San Pedro – apparently a better chance of Lammergeier from there. We get there pretty easily, having seen a few young Fallow Deer along the route and as we drop down to our destination the snow clears (as we are lower down) and we have a fantastic vista across the valley.

As soon as we get out we hear birdsong, with plenty of Chaffinches, Goldfinches, Blackbirds, Coal, Great and Blue Tits around and the weather is lovely. Julian knows of a potential cabin that do hot drinks and walks down the slope to enquire, on the way befriending a large, vocal big dog! He returns all smiles as it is doing coffees etc and we cannot believe our luck. Some of us start down the hill but Charles has found a Nuthatch in a nearby tree followed by a Great Spotted Woodpecker by Joyce and Sue. Julian hears a Crested Tit and with a little patience, Andrew, Hazel and Marilyn get a good look at it. It is hard to pull ourselves away now but we head towards the bar, stopping again to look at a fabulous male Rock Thrush in the brambles – superb. Eventually we reach the cabin and enjoy a 15 minute break for both refreshments and comfort, which is always fundamental in these situations. Once we have finished we go back out into the warm sunshine and walk back to the minibus and start scanning the ridges in earnest.

Griffon Vultures are now starting to appear, right on cue with several now floating around the crags, along with a Sparrowhawk dashing through, near to where we are stood. Julian then spots another distant raptor and immediately thinks 'Goshawk' and after a minute of watching this accipiter in the air is positive. We watch this fabulous predator soar high above the ridge line, showing its huge wings and long rounded tail, even giving a wee display before dropping like a stone into the pine forest below – what a bird! This enhances our resolve to find the main target and not long after this event, Julian again is watching something intently. He now says "Lammergeier" and continues to try and describe its whereabouts, but our view is somewhat impaired by a nearby large Eucalyptus tree. Thankfully it does appear and very well, being tracked by a Griffon Vulture which seems to be giving it some close attention, even semi-mobbing it? A behaviour none of us had ever witnessed before! Tony is ecstatic, having wanted to see one of these 'bone-breakers' for many years and

gets some lovely views through the telescope before it disappears. It is smiles all round as we know we have again pretty much 'ticked all the boxes' on the Sierra de Cazorla. Julian is conscious of the time and would like to spend a wee while at the other mirador but just as he is about to suggest leaving two Griffon Vultures appear overhead, followed by the adult Lammergeier and our views are just simply sublime. Sadly no photos are managed but just to see it so well is good enough and a real bonus to the trip. The Lammergeier does not hang around and flies through the valley into the distance and a 'shell-shocked guide' says "shall we go, as it cannot get any better!" There is no argument and with lunchtime beckoning we head straight to the 'Mirador de Poyos de la Mesa' where we stay for about 30 minutes, not seeing anything new.

Around 1pm we set out of the Natural Park, dropping back down to La Iruela and a lunchtime date with our hotel. It has been fantastic as they have allowed us to use a room to leave our luggage in, while we have been up on the Sierra de Cazorla. Lunch is excellent, being of soup and salad, bread, olives and drinks – just perfect. About an hour later Julian grabs the bags and loads the bus, while we are finishing off in the dining room. Once ready we say "goodbye" to the very attentive staff and set off for our final leg of the tour, Sierra de Andujar – home of the Iberian Lynx.

The journey (as all the others) is an easy one, seeing the usual roadside Common Buzzards and Kestrel but not much else. After about two hours we are turning off the motorway to the town of Andujar and up the winding road to our accommodation on the edge of the Reserve. Julian says he would like us to go out for the final 1.5 hours at the Rio Jandula site and there is no argument. We get to Encinarejos for a little after 5.30pm with just over an hour left of good light, so we walk out to the rocks stuck out into the river at this tranquil location. Our main target is European Otter but we initially see some good birds with Grey and White Wagtails, a flyover Hawfinch, Cormorants, Grey Heron and another Sparrowhawk. Then just after 6pm Julian says "I think I can see signs of an Otter?" but isn't sure until it swims away underwater, leaving its distinctive bubble signature. Some of us are struggling in the low light to see this and when it pops its head up out of the water, only a few get the brief encounter. This is very frustrating as it does not show itself again before it becomes too dark and we need to exit the rocks safely. In the dark we drive back to the accommodation and we are given enough time to freshen up before our first dinner here, which we are very much looking forward too.

**Day 6:** The forecast is dire for most of the today but to our surprise we wake up to just cloudy skies and no rain but we are sure it will happen! After breakfast we leave at 8am and it is still dull outside but a heady 8°C – we cannot believe it. Up we go into the mountains on the Sierra de Andujar, where we soon see our first Red Deer of the holiday. Eventually we reach the 'fighting bulls' estate of Los Escoriales and we stop for a pair of Little Owls, along with Mistle Thrush, Black Redstart and a several Corn Bunting in a solitary Holm Oak. On we go seeing more Red Deer, some Fallow Deer and a couple of Woodlark amongst the

mixed flock of Chaffinches and Meadow Pipits. Eventually we reach the La Lancha Valley and decide to stop at the head but by now the weather has got worse and visibility is poor. Julian decides to walk down the hill in the hope of finding out some recent information, which proves a shrewd move as he meets some local people and gleans some information about Lynx sightings. The weather is getting worse all the time and a soaked Julian returns to the minibus to find us all sheltering, which is great as we need to move on.

The rain continues so the decision is made to drive down to the Jandula Dam wall and spend some time in the 'Bat Cave' – at least it will be dry there. The track down is starting to churn up a little but it's okay and soon enough we reach the bottom and park up. We get our coats back on and armed with a few torches we set off across the wall to the tunnel, seeing a few Crag Martins fly over as we go. The tunnel is a welcome rest bite from the inclement weather and Julian turns on his torch and starts checking for small, furry flying things. Almost immediately we are looking at the small dark shape of a Daubenton, quickly followed by the slightly bigger and paler Schreiber's Bat, of which there are a few. Through the tunnel we walk slowly in darkness, aiming our light towards the ceiling and finding several more with Julian also pointing out a lovely Greater Mouse-eared Bat, which he has not seen in there for a few years. Andrew and Charles have walked through to the other side of the tunnel and see a Hawfinch, which sadly flies off before the rest of us get there. The rain has eased a little as we check the opposite vegetated hillside looking for Spanish Ibex and Golden Eagle, but sadly not today.

Eventually we wander back through the tunnel and back out to the dam wall, where we continue to look for Spanish Ibex without success – good job we have seen them elsewhere! The rain is still falling steadily and with no sign of giving up, so Julian suggest we return to the accommodation for a hot drink and then lunch, before reviewing the situation later, there is absolutely no argument. We drive back up past La Lancha very slowly, passing some very dejected Lynx watchers and also encounter a huge flock of Iberian Magpies and our first Rabbit of the day. On we go up to the 'fighting bulls' area of Los Escoriales, where we stop first for a Hoopoe right next to the bus, followed by a mixed flock of Chaffinches, Meadow Pipit and a couple of Greenfinch. We pass the stationary Little Owls that now look a little bedraggled in the light rain and Helen comments that it's looking brighter? She is definitely not wrong as the rain is easing a little now as we get to the tarmac road and continue through to our finca.

It is about midday when we get to the accommodation so Julian says we should have an early lunch, which is a very sensible idea. We use the facilities while Julian works out the coffee machine and between us we organise cups, plates, cutlery, etc for our lunch, along with the picnic stuff we had carried with us during the morning. This is a very welcome break, especially from the weather, as it starts to rain heavily again. However after lunch we are ready to brave it again and still with some drizzle we set off back towards Los Escoriales with the blue skies in the distance and better weather moving in to the Sierra de Andujar.

Back at the 'fighting bulls' area we see much the same species plus a couple of Common Buzzards and our very faithful Little Owls, who are now also enjoying the afternoon sunshine. We continue through to the La Lancha valley seeing the ubiquitous Red and Fallow Deer that frequent the far end of Los Escoriales and over the hillsides there are now a gathering of vultures. We park towards the bottom of the valley in the hope an Iberian Lynx would pass by after a morning of sheltering from the rain. We really enjoy the raptors circling behind us, which include lots of Griffon Vultures, a few Black Vultures (good for comparison) and a fabulous adult Spanish Imperial Eagle. Hazel does fantastically finding a handsome 'bright blue' male Blue Rock Thrush just below where we are standing and makes for a great photo opportunity for some of us. As the afternoon wears on we continue to look for this elusive cat but there is no sign, but we are still conscious this is our first real attempt and have plenty of time left. Charles then says "what's this raptor?" and we look in the direction he's looking and Julian spots a Sparrowhawk flying low and away from us and says so – but this is clearly a different bird! Our guide now gets on to Charles's raptor and sees its much different, being more robust and short tailed, saying "Peregrine Falcon" and we watch it power up the valley and over the ridge. Charles is very pleased we managed to eventually find it and then identify it.

It is now late afternoon on our first full day here and Julian suggests we head back to the accommodation, things have gone a wee bit quiet and who knows what we might see on our way back – we are all pretty tired now and agree it's a good idea. The drive back is unproductive, seeing all the same things we have already seen during the course of the day – fingers crossed tomorrow will be better and not just the weather!

**Day 7:** We are hoping for better weather and after breakfast we meet at the minibus to a clear, crisp morning – in fact there is ice on the windows and windscreen. This is soon dealt with and off we go up the winding road towards Las Escoriales, with an incredible sunrise coming out over the Sierra Nevadas to the east. We get glimpses of both Red and Fallow Deer along the route, until we get to the 'fighting bulls' when Julian slows to say "good morning" to our resident pair of Little Owls – as Hazel rightly says "they are reliable!" Also here on this glorious morning we get a brief view of a Serin amongst the Chaffinches and in one Holm Oak we see at least 20 Corn Buntings. On we go for a short while until Julian says "Mouflon – on the left" and points towards a fabulous mixed flock of 25 animals, which are quite close. The Rams looks superb in the morning sunshine, so it's out with the cameras. Once ready we set off again and drive slowly through the estate until we start to drop down towards the La Lancha valley. This is spectacular as there is a layer of mist in the bottom half of the valley, making it all look incredibly atmospheric.

Julian today opts for the top of the valley as this is the clearest area and out we get from the van and ready ourselves for a morning's vigil. There is birdsong everywhere, with Red-legged Partridge, Chaffinch, Robin, Sardinian and Dartford Warbler being heard as we search for this elusive cat. Our guide wanders down

the road slowly as he can hear Magpies, he sees a couple of Rabbits, then a Red-legged Partridge flies up so he slowly continues but sees nothing. He climbs a small mound, which has a good viewshed and his knees buckle slightly as he is face to face with an Iberian Lynx! He is lucky the Lynx is concentrating on the Rabbits obviously so he backs off quickly and contacts Andrew who has the other walkie-talkie. Sue is just down the track and our guide waves to her who also helps rally everyone. Julian can now again see the place where the Lynx was but no animal is there! However the Magpies are still around and as we all arrive and a quick brief is given Sue spots the Lynx appearing from behind a Mastic Tree and walking up the bank. Our luck is out as most of us just see a rear-end view disappearing under a Holm Oak and over the ridge with a couple of us not seeing anything! Julian says we need to search, which we do intently for the next hour but everything has gone quiet, including the Magpies. We don't know whether the animal has just laid down, carried on or doubled back up the hill – we cannot believe our poor luck. A lovely close female Blue Rock Thrush is some recompense as is an Iberian Green Woodpecker sat right out on a granite rock. Around 10.30am Julian says we must leave as we are having to move accommodation back to the hotel we should have been in originally. This isn't a real issue as we had planned on another site this afternoon and it means we can have our picnic lunch in the grounds.

We set off back and again at Las Escoriales we are halted by two pairs of Hoopoe feeding right out in the open in the bright sunlight, allowing for some very passable images to be taken. There are also the usual Black Redstart, Mistle Thrush, Red-legged Partridge and we say “goodbye” to our cute pair of Little Owls on their usual granite rock. Eventually we reach the Finca Las Catanas and the plan is simple, pack our luggage, leave it by the front door and return to the van. This is done seamlessly and Julian takes us now round to the Finca Caracola, where we off-load our small bags and scopes, get our new rooms and enjoy the grounds while Julian goes back for our main luggage. This is brilliant as it allows us to investigate the area before Julian returns and have lunch.

Out and about Andrew, Marilyn and Sue are very successful seeing Crested, Great and Blue Tits, Nuthatch, Iberian Magpie and Serin. Charles has also had a wee walk about and has also seen a Great Spotted Woodpecker, with Tony and Joyce having a couple of Griffon Vultures overhead. Eventually our guide returns and distributes our bags to the respective rooms and joins us outside for a lovely picnic, along with a very welcome hot drink – although it is very pleasant in the early afternoon sunshine. Once we are finished Julian asks us to reconvene at 3pm but first he wants to take Joyce and Tony to the bird photography hide and put some more food out for our feather friends! We have not gone 50m when Julian hears a familiar call, looks up and shouts “Golden Eagle, mobbed by two Common Buzzards”. What a fantastic sight, right above our heads and Joyce manages to get some fantastic shots of this wonderful avian predator before it closes its wings and disappears. Tony simply says “it's the holiday that just keeps giving!” The rest of our free time is spent at leisure before we meet for an afternoon along the River Jandula.

We drive out to the Embalse de Encinarejos and park near the dam wall readying ourselves for a gentle walk back along the river on this very pleasant afternoon. We start well with Julian spotting a House Martin amongst the Crag Martins and down at the river we see a few Cormorants. On we go seeing a couple of distant Black Vultures along with Chiffchaffs, Chaffinches, Robin, Long-tailed, Blue and Great Tits. We stop to look at another Long-tailed Tit flock when Julian points out a Firecrest in the adjacent Holm Oak, which sadly disappears too quickly. A little further and a familiar call alerts us to a pair of Nuthatches with one of them cleaning out an old woodpecker hole to use as their own – this is brilliant to watch. On we go with Julian stopping again to show us a beautiful area of vivid yellow Hoop Petticoat Narcissus before we stop for a while overlooking the river below. It is now mid afternoon and still warm with a few butterflies on the wing, including Clouded Yellow, Western Dappled White and Small Heath, which is great. Julian is conscious of the time and suggests we start back to the 'Otter Watchpoint' with a hope of better success tonight. This is soon done and while most of us make our way out on to the rocks, our guide carries on to collect the van. Eventually we are all here and settled down into position as the sun is setting behind the trees to the west.

A little after 6pm Andrew urgently says "Otter – down here coming towards us" and we look down and to our left but don't see the animal. Andrew also cannot see where it has gone and is confused by the whole thing as it was looking to swim our way? We are now intently searching and after a while Julian then sees an Otter's signature under the water of a line of bubbles heading into the centre of the pool, but it goes deep! We are now getting a little frustrated especially when Tony says "its over the other side but just dived again" and still we don't all see this canny aquatic mammal. Marilyn comments how much easier they are in Scotland at the coast! Then Sue, who is looking in the other direction, says very excitedly "LYNX – left hand side of the river". Our attention from the pool is immediately dropped and we look where Sue is looking and see a gorgeous Iberian Lynx climbing on to the adjacent rocks – this is now a proper full view of this rare cat and top predator of this land. The light is low but we can clearly see as it checks out a couple of small caves, scent marking them along the way before climbing off the rocks and disappearing behind some bushes. Julian and Andrew move across their rocks and quickly find it again continuing along the river and crossing a small area of open grass but again it moves out of sight and this time into a large area of deep vegetation. These guys return to the rest of us and Julian thinks there is half a chance it might cross the bridge so carefully we go back to the bus and drive down to the dam wall, waiting patiently. We are though gushing with excitement and just talk about what has just happened, congratulating Sue on her fantastic find and our own very good fortune – Julian is just so relieved! The Lynx does not appear before it gets too dark to see but we don't really care and we set off back to the hotel, only for a Tawny Owl to fly across our path – what a day this has been, with still one to go.

**Day 8:** It's our final full day of the 'Predators of S/E Spain' tour, its Valentine's Day but most importantly its Joyce's birthday. We hope for something special today with



a Wild Boar being the only target mammal left to see – what a trip this has been already! At the usual 8am meeting time we are outside on this much milder morning as there is some cloud cover. We set off and once we get near to Los Escoriales we start to see the expected mammals and birds with both deer, Chaffinches, Robin, Red-legged Partridge, and Mistle Thrush at the side of the road. We say “good morning” to the Little Owls before carrying on through the ‘fighting bulls’ estate. Julian again stops and points out the Mouflon flock again but this time they are next to a herd of Fallow Deer, with the females looking incredibly similar.

We carry on slowly, now dropping down to the La Lancha valley where we see another ‘French’ tour group stood at the side of the road – Julian knows instinctively it has to be a Lynx but wasn’t prepared for this. They have come across a large male Iberian Lynx chewing on a Red Deer carcass right out in the open! For our guide it is like lightning striking twice as this happened also on his previous Speyside Wildlife Lynx tour, which was incredibly the first time ever! There he is about 100m away still in the low light and with (sadly) the sun rising behind him and into our faces. However the views through the telescope are simply fantastic and we watch fascinated, it pulls lumps of food out of the inside of the animal – simply gorging itself. This goes on for well over an hour with this Lynx relishing in its breakfast as the Magpies look on waiting for a tasty morsel. After about 90 minutes it starts to try and cover this kill and then lays down for a wee while, allowing us to change camera batteries, etc and just smile about the experience we are enjoying. In fact Joyce says “it’s the best birthday present ever!” Our cat decides to stand up again surprisingly and start his ‘second breakfast’ (almuerzo) but this doesn’t last long and soon enough this time he sits down and looks to go to sleep. Julian now asks the question if we are okay to move on, and we say “yes”, which seems quite strange leaving this wonderfully rare Iberian Lynx sat still right out in the open.

Our plan now is to drive all the way down to the bottom of the valley and look again at the ‘Bat Tunnel’ and walk along the trail following the river downstream. We walk out on to the dam wall and Charles immediately sees both House and Crag Martins, with Hazel spotting an adult Golden Eagle overhead. We track this avian predator with our binoculars hoping it will land on the opposite crags (as per previous visits) but sadly not as it disappears out of sight. So on we go over the dam wall, scanning everywhere for a Wallcreeper, which actually isn’t here but we can ‘live in hope’. Eventually we get to the tunnel and Julian fires up his torch along with Sue and Andrew, searching the ceiling above us. It isn’t long before we find a Daubenton followed by a second, tucked right up into their holes.

We continue through and Julian finds again the Greater Mouse-eared Bat, now getting an acceptable photo as we do with the only Schreiber’s Bat we find in full view – still a successful exercise. Slowly we all get through the tunnel to the other side, where a Grey Heron is flying towards a small island with a couple of Cormorants resting on there. Andrew has already seen a Serin, which has

unfortunately flown off as some of us have yet to see this relatively common Southern European finch. We stay here for a while scanning the ridges and seeing our first Griffon and Black Vultures along with an 'uber-distant' Spanish Imperial Eagle. We now decide to wander back through the tunnel and get back to the dam wall as we see a male Blue Rock Thrush sat on a nearby stone wall. Julian stops to chat to a Spanish observer involved with the other French tour group and is told about a European Eagle Owl that can be seen in its roosting cave. Without delay we make our way back to the minibus to collect all the telescopes and with the other groups guide we walk along the edge of the river until the end of the track. On the way Julian spots a male Goshawk displaying over the opposite ridge, which is a nice way of repaying their kindness of sharing their Eagle Owl. Once there the Galician guide sets up Julian's scope and points it into a crevice in the opposite rock face, where an adult Eagle Owl is wedged in. Even through a 'zoomed up' scope it still is not easy to see although when the sun moves round a little it becomes more discernible, which is great. We stay there watching this complete surprise and wondering how the other group found it, even if it called to make known its existence.

It is now lunchtime and we have seen enough of the owl, which is a complete bonus, we walk slowly back to the minibus and drive back up the hill to the Mirador de Embalse de Jandula. We carry our picnic out to the granite tables and benches and enjoy our lunch in lovely warm sunshine. Julian checks the distant ridge and finds one of the adult Golden Eagles sat there but it is a long way off as are the vultures floating round. Charles sees a Small Heath butterfly and then a pair of adult Spanish Imperial Eagles show well above our heads – what a wonderful place.

After lunch we pack up and the plan now is to head slowly back towards the hotel stopping at the carcass and for whatever else shows along the route. Being early afternoon things are very much quietening down for a siesta and back at the carcass the Iberian Lynx has walked away (probably to return later but it's now well eaten!). On we drive up to Los Escoriales where we see much of the same bird species, stop for a photo at the 'comeros de granito' and for the flock of Mouflon – now on the opposite side of the track. We want to say our final goodbye to our Little Owls but they're not home, obviously punishing us for leaving the next morning! Beyond this estate it remains quiet and soon enough we arrive at the accommodation with a couple of hours to ourselves, which is lovely.

At 5pm we reconvene at the bus and it's still warm when we 'stick to plan' and head again for the Rio Jandula site, getting there and immediately walking out to the rocks. We would love a repeat performance of the previous night, plus an Otter and also a Wild Boar or three (not much really!) Encinarejos is a wonderfully peaceful place and even if it's quiet for wildlife it's just lovely to sit here in this gorgeous location. Although it's not quiet as Julian soon spots a couple of Short-toed Treecreepers followed by several House Martins overhead. A Grey Wagtail is spotted by Tony and Andrew sees a Moorhen

at the bottom end of the pool along with Cormorants, Iberian Magpies, Chiffchaffs and a Common Pipistrelle flying round in the fading daylight.

A little after 6pm, Julian says "Otter – same place as last night" and some of us see the head of this aquatic mammal just before it disappears back into the banking (so that's where it went!). We continue to look and it is seen again briefly around the 'holt' before being watched under water heading out to the centre of the pool. It is then Andrew who sees it again and this time we all manage some kind of view in the now dull light, which is a relief to Julian. Charles sees it finally as we presume again it has headed off down river to fish as there is no sign before we leave around 6.40pm. There are some slivers of light left as we get back in the bus and Julian drives slowly down the track in hope of the elusive Wild Boar. This is proving impossible but a shape in the gloom has our guide saying "Red Fox" pointing to his left and then he turns the bus and gets this scarce (on Andujar) predator in the headlights, which is brilliant. The fox obviously soon disappears as the Spanish don't call it 'Zorro' for nothing and we carry on to the hotel, with Joyce beaming like a Cheshire Cat at her fantastic birthday wildlife day.

We have slightly longer tonight before our dinner time, which allows us to freshen up and even get some packing done ahead of the next morning. The meal is lovely with a final surprise for Joyce of a delicious birthday cake and some cava to wash it down. We are sure this will be a day she will remember for a long time. After this Julian suggests we do the species log at the table and with our hot drinks, we go through the list followed by the special species, places and moments of the tour. It is a fitting final evening to this fantastic holiday, which clearly held so many good memories to take back to the UK.

**Day 9:** After our final breakfast, we set off on schedule at 8am and drive the winding road to Andujar, then westbound on to the motorway. The roads are quiet and we make good progress to Córdoba seeing Kestrel, Raven and Mallard before we are treated to White Storks on their nests at the city. Beyond Córdoba and now heading south and we see roadside Red Kite, Common Buzzard and lots of Lesser Black-backed Gulls but the journey is generally quiet through hectares of olive grove, vine and cereal fields.

Nearly two hours into our trip back to Malaga we call into a motorway services for a hot drink, which is most welcome along with the obligatory comfort break. Back in the van we continue south to Malaga passing through the lovely 'Montes de Malaga' with the Almond Trees in full bloom. Just outside the city a small group of Monk Parakeets fly over the motorway and we can now see the glisten of the Mediterranean Sea. It is not long before we are nearing the airport but we still have a little time to visit the coast nearby and head down into the urbanization of Guadalmar parking near the beach. There are lots of Crag Martins around with Sue spotting a Barn Swallow amongst them and all around are Spotless Starlings. We walk the short distance to the edge of the sea and from a raised watchpoint we scan round with us finding a small flock of Mediterranean Gulls, along with lots more Lesser Black-backed Gulls and in the distance there are

a few Gannets passing by. We don't have much time and after about 20 minutes Julian says we need to head for the airport and we return to the minibus.

The short journey to Malaga Airport is seamless and we arrive with plenty of time to check-in for our flight home. We say our fond farewells to our guide and wish him well for his next trip, which starts shortly and leave him to return the van to the rental company. Bringing to an end a very successful and enjoyable holiday looking for 'Predators in S/E Spain'

### **Species of the Trip**

Sue – European Genet & Glossy Ibis  
Charles – Iberian Lynx & Golden Eagle  
Hazel – Iberian Lynx & Lammergeier  
Andrew – European Genet & Hoopoe  
Marilyn – Iberian Lynx & Greater Spotted Eagle  
Joyce – European Genet & Lammergeier/Spanish Imperial Eagle  
Tony – Greater Spotted Eagle & Lammergeier  
Julian – European Genet & Golden Eagle

### **Place of the Trip**

Sue – Albacete Steppes  
Charles – Mirador de Poyos de la Mesa  
Hazel – Albufera d'Valencia  
Andrew – Nava de San Pedro  
Marilyn – Road through Los Escoriales to La Lancha  
Joyce – Casa Rural Caracola  
Tony – La Lancha Valley  
Julian – Casas de Benali

### **Magic Moment**

Sue – Finding the Iberian Lynx at Encinarejos.  
Charles – The command performance by the Genet.  
Hazel – Seeing the first 'proper' view of a Lynx at Encinarejos.  
Andrew – Seeing the first 'proper' view of a Lynx at Encinarejos.  
Marilyn – Seeing the first 'proper' view of a Lynx at Encinarejos.  
Joyce – Getting awesome views of Lynx on her birthday.  
Tony – Watching both the Genet and the Lynx feed.  
Julian – Finding the Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, at a last chance site.

## **Birds**

Shelduck  
Mallard  
Gadwall  
Pintail  
Shoveler  
Wigeon  
Eurasian Teal  
Common Pochard  
Red Crested Pochard  
White-headed Duck  
Red-legged Partridge  
Black-necked Grebe  
Little Grebe  
Northern Gannet  
Cormorant  
Cattle Egret  
Little Egret  
Great Egret  
Grey Heron  
Little Bittern  
White Stork  
Glossy Ibis  
Greater Flamingo  
Lammergeier  
Griffon Vulture  
Black Vulture  
Osprey  
Golden Eagle  
Spanish Imperial Eagle  
Greater Spotted Eagle  
Red Kite  
Common Buzzard  
Sparrowhawk  
Goshawk  
Common Kestrel  
Peregrine  
Moorhen  
Common Coot  
Red-knobbed Coot  
Purple Swamphen  
Great Bustard  
Avocet  
Black-winged Stilt  
Golden Plover  
Lapwing  
Sanderling

Dunlin  
Common Sandpiper  
Common Redshank  
Greenshank  
Black-tailed Godwit  
Common Snipe  
Ruff  
Black-headed Gull  
Slender-billed Gull  
Mediterranean Gull  
Yellow-legged Gull  
Lesser Black-backed Gull  
Sandwich Tern  
Black-bellied Sandgrouse  
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse  
Rock Dove  
Feral Pigeon  
Woodpigeon  
Collared Dove  
European Eagle Owl  
Tawny Owl  
Little Owl  
Monk Parakeet  
Hoopoe  
Common Kingfisher  
Iberian Green Woodpecker  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Skylark  
Crested Lark  
Thekla Lark  
Woodlark  
Calandra Lark  
Crag Martin  
Barn Swallow  
House Martin  
Water Pipit  
Meadow Pipit  
White Wagtail  
Grey Wagtail  
Dunnock  
Alpine Accentor  
Robin  
Bluethroat  
Black Redstart  
Stonechat  
Song Thrush

Mistle Thrush  
Blackbird  
Blue Rock Thrush  
Blackcap  
Sardinian Warbler  
Dartford Warbler  
Cetti's Warbler (heard only)  
Common Chiffchaff  
Firecrest  
Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Coal Tit  
Crested Tit  
Long-tailed Tit  
Nuthatch  
Short-toed Treecreeper  
Iberian Grey Shrike  
Azure-winged Magpie  
Magpie  
Jay  
Red-billed Chough  
Carrion Crow  
Raven  
Spotless Starling  
House Sparrow  
Rock Sparrow  
Chaffinch  
Linnet  
Goldfinch  
Greenfinch  
Serin  
Hawfinch  
alus lucitanicus

Cirl Bunting  
Corn Bunting  
Rock Bunting

### **Mammal List**

Iberian Lynx  
European Genet  
European Otter  
Rabbit  
Iberian Hare  
Red Deer  
Fallow Deer  
Mouflon  
Spanish Ibex  
Red Fox  
Red Squirrel  
Greater Mouse-eared Bat  
Schreiber's Bat  
Daubenton  
Common Pipistrelle

### **Amphibian List**

Western Spadefoot

### **Plant List**

Common Jonquil  
Hoop Petticoat Narcissus  
Angel Tears Narcissus  
Bermuda Buttercup  
Storksbill  
Vipers Beugloss  
Astrag