

NORTHERN SPAIN

Mammals, birds and butterflies of Asturias & Cantabria
Somiedo Natural Park, Asturias and Riaño (south of Picos de Europa) León
31 August - 9 September 2017
Kath & Mick Claydon kandm.claydon@gmail.com

A 10-day tailor-made trip arranged for us by **Steve West** of *Birding in Spain* (www.BirdingInSpain.com) to look for wildlife in Somiedo Natural Park (Asturias) and around Riaño south of the Picos de Europa. On this trip we were not concentrating on birds, we hoped to see a bear (reasonable chance) and perhaps a wolf (much more difficult) but our interests are varied and we look at everything. We were lucky with the bears, seeing a total of 7 individuals, but not with wolves. In late summer the bears should be feeding high in the mountains on bilberries but this year the crop has failed and we watched bears lower down, gorging on ripening hazel nuts. For wolves, Steve had booked a couple of sessions with Wild Watching Spain as this seemed to be the best way to increase our chance but our luck was out; lots of reasons for the failure were suggested (such as the fact that the hunting season had just begun) but maybe they are just too elusive and it takes an enormous amount of luck to gain a sighting. We've yet to establish the success-rate of Wild Watching Spain. Otherwise, we did well for mammals seeing several Chamois, Red and Roe Deer, two Red Foxes and two Wildcats. We took everything at a slow, relaxed pace which meant we saw plenty of butterflies (more species than we expected at this time of year) and a good bird list without our usual efforts to seek them out. It was a very enjoyable trip. As well as being a very good birder Steve West is also interested in all wildlife, he's good company and has a professional attitude to guiding; we are very happy to recommend him.

We flew into Asturias airport and spent 4 nights in Pola de Somiedo then moved to the village of Boca de Huerfano near Riaño for a 5-night stay. On the last day we spent a couple of hours around the Villaviciosa estuary east of Gijón, adding quite a few bird species to our list. The first and last days were wet/damp but otherwise we had much sunshine with temperatures reaching the low to mid 20s most days, occasionally up to 27°C. Mornings were cool, with ground frost a couple of mornings at Boca de Huerfano.

SOMIEDO

We took an indirect scenic route southwards from the airport, stopping for a quick lunch in the town of Proaza. There were several stops on route to Somiedo for birds and anything else of interest - Tree Pipits, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Red Fox, etc. We noticed an elderly lady wearing the traditional wooden clogs "Madreñas" which look strange but it seems they are brilliant for walking in the steep, wet and muddy terrain. As we passed through a spectacular gorge we saw a flock of more than 100 Choughs - mostly Red-billed but a few Alpines were amongst them. It was dull and drizzly most of the day but not particularly cold. As we reached Somiedo Natural Park the ground was covered in the crocus-like flower *Merendera pyrenaica*, their deep pink-purple petals eye-catching in the rather poor light. Our accommodation was in small town of Pola de Somiedo at a rather special little hotel Palacio Florez Estrada, which has a fascinating history (www.florezestrada.com), nestled amongst the mountains and with Dippers in the river that tumbles through the grounds. After quickly unpacking we drove a few minutes along the road to a known hot-spot for Brown Bear. Several people were around and as Steve is fluent in Spanish we got "the latest" on sightings. We didn't dare hope for success - maybe a glimpse of one crossing a distant clearing? No, we were luckier than that - for about an hour we watched a young bear wandering across the hillside, clambering around in Hazel bushes and stripping branches of nuts. Although this was on the opposite side of the valley the 'scope views were brilliant. Later, we found a nice restaurant in town, serving huge portions of local dishes: two courses with house wine came to about £15 per head.

We went "bear-watching" morning and evening for the next few days and had success on each occasion except the last (when it rained and we gave up). We saw a total of 7 different bears, two youngsters (4-5 years old) that were curious but wary of each other (providing some very entertaining behaviours), another a bit older, a big male and a female with 2 small cubs. We couldn't believe our luck. For the rest of the time we explored the green valleys and mountain sides around Pola, never travelling very far just wandering and enjoying what wildlife crossed our path in fabulous scenery. Some of the highlights for us (in addition to the bears!) were superb views of a Wallcreeper, a Common Rock Thrush, the huge flock of Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, Red-underwing Skipper and Meleager's Blue butterflies.

Species around Somiedo included: BIRDS *Egyptian and Griffon Vultures; Honey and Common Buzzards; Short-toed and Golden Eagles; Kestrel; Peregrine; Common Swift; Hoopoe; Iberian Green Woodpecker; Wood Lark; Crag Martin; Barn Swallow; House Martin; Tree and Water Pipits; Grey and White Wagtails; Dipper; Wren; Dunnock; Robin; Black Restart; Whinchat; Stonechat; Northern Wheatear; Common Rock Thrush; Blackbird; Song and Mistle Thrushes; Blackcap; Common Whitethroat; Willow Warbler; Spotted and Pied Flycatchers; Long-tailed, Coal, Blue, Great and Marsh Tits; Nuthatch; Wallcreeper; Red-backed Shrike; Jay; Magpie; Red-billed and Alpine Choughs; Carrion Crow; Raven; Rock Sparrow; Chaffinch; Serin; Greenfinch; Goldfinch; Linnet; Bullfinch; Yellowhammer; Rock Bunting. MAMMALS *Brown Bear; Red Fox; Chamois; Roe Deer.* INSECTS *Red-underwing; Grizzled and Oberthür's Grizzled Skippers; Large, Small and Green-veined Whites; Clouded and Berger's Clouded Yellows; Scarce, Purple-edged and**

Small Coppers; Holly, Common, Adonis, Chalk-hill and Meleager's Blues; Brown Argus; Provencal Fritillary; Speckled Wood; Wall and Large Wall Browns; Small Heath; Meadow Brown; Tree Grayling; Hummingbird Hawk-moth.
REPTILES Common Wall Lizard; West Iberian Rock Lizard.

RIAÑO

It was hard to drag ourselves away from Somiedo on 4th, we'd had such a good time, seen so much, but we were heading for another fantastic area. Our route took us through varied scenery and we made several short detours to walk by flower-rich meadows, grazing land, hillsides and villages. We saw masses of birds - Mistle Thrushes were incredibly numerous, feeding across field after field, hundreds of them; in fact they became a real feature of the whole Riaño area. One of several detours took us to a tiny village, Peredilla north of La Robla, where we had three Golden Eagles in the air together, a sub-adult and two adults, and we spent a while chasing a variety of butterflies. We reached our very comfortable hotel, Tierra de la Reina in Boca de Huergano, at about 16.30. After checking in we drove along the nearby valley looking for Wildcat but we weren't lucky.

The next day was spent between Boca de Huergano and areas around Puerto de San Glorio on the southern edge of the Picos de Europa, finding Citril Finches, a Black Woodpecker which unbelievably flew towards us and perched **on a rock**, a couple of Booted Eagles, Goshawk, a migrating Marsh Harrier, Iberian Chiffchaffs, Woodchat Shrike and more Rock Sparrows. Turquoise and Escher's Blue butterflies were good, too.

On 6th Wild Watching Spain took us in search of wolves. The guide, Maria, met us at 07.30 in a 4x4 for the long, bumpy drive way up onto the mountain along a very rough track. No luck, only Red Deer. We can't fault Maria, she scanned and scanned without pause for over 2 hours but it wasn't to be. Great views up there, though, and a stunning male Bluethroat on breeding grounds was some compensation! We had another session in a different area that evening, up an even rougher track with a bit of walk at the end. More lovely scenery, Black Woodpecker calling, but no wolf. Disappointing but not entirely unexpected. During the day we searched for other wildlife and were rewarded with, amongst other things, good views of a Wildcat resting in the shade of a bush.

The next two days were spent exploring the areas around Boca de Huergano and the general Reserva Nacional Riaño area. Highlights were mostly butterflies such as Berger's Clouded Yellows, Short-tailed and Chalk-hill Blues, Queen of Spain Fritillary, a well-marked female Western Green Lizard and a large Praying Mantis. Early one evening as we enjoyed a drink in the hotel garden two new butterflies showed themselves - Cardinal and Dark-green Fritillary. We rounded off the day with a slow drive along the valley and watched a Wildcat for half an hour as it hunted across a meadow.

Species around Riaño included: BIRDS Grey Heron; Egyptian and Griffon Vultures; Booted, Short-toed and Golden Eagles; Marsh Harrier; Sparrowhawk; Goshawk; Common Buzzard; Kestrel; Yellow-legged Gull; Common Swift; Hoopoe; Iberian Green and Black Woodpeckers (Middle-spotted heard); Skylark; Crag Martin; Barn Swallow; House Martin; Tree and Water Pipits; Yellow and White Wagtails; Dunnock; Robin; Bluethroat; Black Redstart; Whinchat; Stonechat; Northern Wheatear; Song and Mistle Thrushes; Blackbird; Cetti's Warbler; Blackcap; Iberian Chiffchaff; Willow Warbler; (Dartford Warbler heard); Spotted and Pied Flycatchers; Coal, Blue Great and Marsh Tits; Nuthatch; Woodchat Shrike; Jay; Magpie; Red-billed Chough; Crow; Raven; Spotless Starling; Rock Sparrow; Chaffinch; Serin; Citril Finch; Goldfinch; Linnet; Crossbill; Yellowhammer; Rock Bunting. MAMMALS Red Fox; Chamois; Red Deer; Wildcat. INSECTS Mallow Skipper; Grizzled Skipper; Wood White; Large, Small and Green-veined Whites; Clouded and Berger's Clouded Yellows; Brimstone; Scarce, Sooty and Small Coppers; Short-tailed, Lang's Short-tailed, Long-tailed, Turquoise, Escher's, Common, Adonis, Chalk-hill and Spanish Chalk-hill Blues; Brown Argus; Comma; Cardinal, Dark-green and Queen of Spain Fritillaries; Speckled Wood; Wall Brown; Small Heath; Meadow Brown; Grayling; Great Banded Grayling. Hummingbird Hawk-moth. Praying Mantis sp. Southern Hawker Dragonfly. REPTILES Western Green Lizard.

The sky was heavy and dark on our last morning and it soon began to rain. Not much point trying for another Wildcat so we finished packing and took a slow route north-eastwards. The rain continued most of the morning but we still managed to add a few species to our list - Little Egrets and two 2 Hobbys. We reached the Villaviciosa estuary and picked up a number of species by checking every possible viewing point. As the showers became heavier we decided to find somewhere nice for lunch and spent 2 hours enjoying an excellent "menu of the day" for €14.50 per head including wine. We reached Asturias airport around 17.00hrs and sadly said goodbye to Steve.

Today's species included: BIRDS Mallard; Cormorant; Little Egret; Osprey; Egyptian Vulture; Common Buzzard; Hobby; Kestrel; Avocet; Common Sandpiper; Greenshank; Whimbrel; Curlew; Black-tailed Godwit; Black-headed, Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls; Kingfisher; Barn Swallow; White Wagtail; Black Redstart; (Firecrest Heard). INSECTS Long-tailed Blues.

BIRDS 95 species seen + 5 heard only [H]

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*
European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*
Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*
Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*
Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*
Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*
Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*
Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*
Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
[Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* H]
Common Swift *Apus apus*
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocoptes medius*
[Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* H]
Iberian Green Woodpecker *Picus sharpei*
Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*
Red-billed Chough *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
Alpine Chough *Pyrhocorax graculus*
Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*
Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*
Northern Raven *Corvus corax*
Coal Tit *Periparus ater*
Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*
European Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

MAMMALS

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*
Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*
Wildcat *Felis silvestris*
Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*
Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*
Pyrenean Chamois *Rupicapra pyrenaica parva*

Great Tit *Parus major*
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*
Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*
Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
[Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* H]
[Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* H]
Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*
Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*
[Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* H]
Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*
Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*
European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*
European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*
European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*
Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*
European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*
Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*
Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Citril Finch *Carduelis citrinella*
European Serin *Serinus serinus*
Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*
Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

BUTTERFLIES 40 species

Mallow Skipper *Carcharodus alceae*
Red-underwing Skipper *Spialia sertorius*
Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*
Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus armoricanus*
Wood White *Leptides sinapis*
Large White *Pieris brassicae*
Small White *Pieris rapae*
Green-veined White *Pieris napi*
Berger's Clouded Yellow *Colias alfacariensis*
Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*
Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*
Scarce Copper *Lycaena virgaureae*
Sooty Copper *Lycaena tityrus*
Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*
Purple-edged Copper *Lycaena hippothoe*
Lang's Short-tailed Blue *Leptotes pirithous*
Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*
Short-tailed Blue *Everas argiacies*
Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*
Escher's Blue *Polyommatus escheri*

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*
Turquoise Blue *Polyommatus dorylas*
Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus*
Chalk-hill Blue *Lysandra coridon* possibly *asturiensis*
Spanish Chalk-hill Blue *Lysandra albicans arragonensis*
Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*
Maleager's Blue *Meleageria daphnis*
Comma *Polygonia c-album*
Provençal Fritillary *Mellicta dejone*
Cardinal *Argynnis pandora*
Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*
Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia*
Speckled Wood *Pararge aegaria*
Wall Brown *Lasionmmata megera*
Large Wall Brown *Lasionmmata maera*
Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*
Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*
Great Banded Grayling *Brintesia circe*
Tree Grayling *Hipparchia statilinus*
Grayling *Hipparchia semele*

OTHER INVERTEBRATES

Hummingbird Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum*
Blue / Southern Hawker Dragonfly *Aeshna cyanea*
Praying Mantis *Mantis (religiosa)*

REPTILES

Western Green Lizard *Lacerta bilineata*
Common Wall Lizard *Podarcis muralis*
West Iberian Rock Lizard *Iberolacerta monticola*