

# Aragón, Spain (Pyrenees and Plains)

4 to 8 June 2010

Nick Littlewood

([nicklittlewood@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nicklittlewood@yahoo.co.uk))

## Summary

This was a short solo trip aimed in particular at finding a few species that would be new for me; namely Dupont's Lark, Lammergeier, Citril Finch, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Western Orphean Warbler and Rock Thrush. All these were seen with greater or lesser effort and other highlights included Melodious Warbler, Red-necked Nightjar, Egyptian Vulture and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse.

## Logistics

I flew from Edinburgh to Girona in the far north-east of Cataluña province. This entailed a long drive at the Spanish end but was the closest I could get from a Scottish airport. I pre-hired a tiny car from Goldcar (a Daewoo Matiz) which I picked up and dropped off at the airport. I took a tent with me and stayed at Camping Pirineos ([www.campingpirineos.es](http://www.campingpirineos.es)). They have a Bird Log at reception which contained some useful snippets.

## Sites Visited

The area is relatively well known for birding. Maps 1 and 2 show the main areas visited on this trip. Most of these sites are covered in these guides:

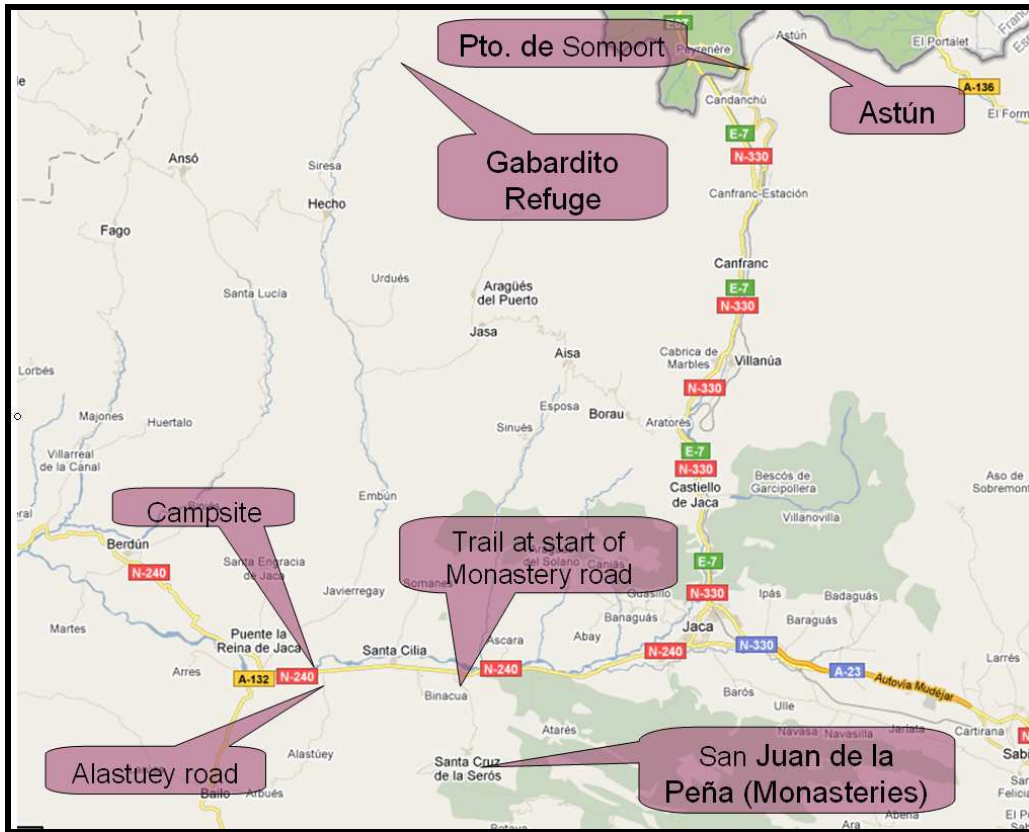
S. West (2004) *Where the Birds are in Northeast Spain*. Steve West (available from Subbuteo Books)

M. Rebane & E. Garcia (2008) *Where to Watch Birds in Northern and Eastern Spain*. Christopher Helm, London.

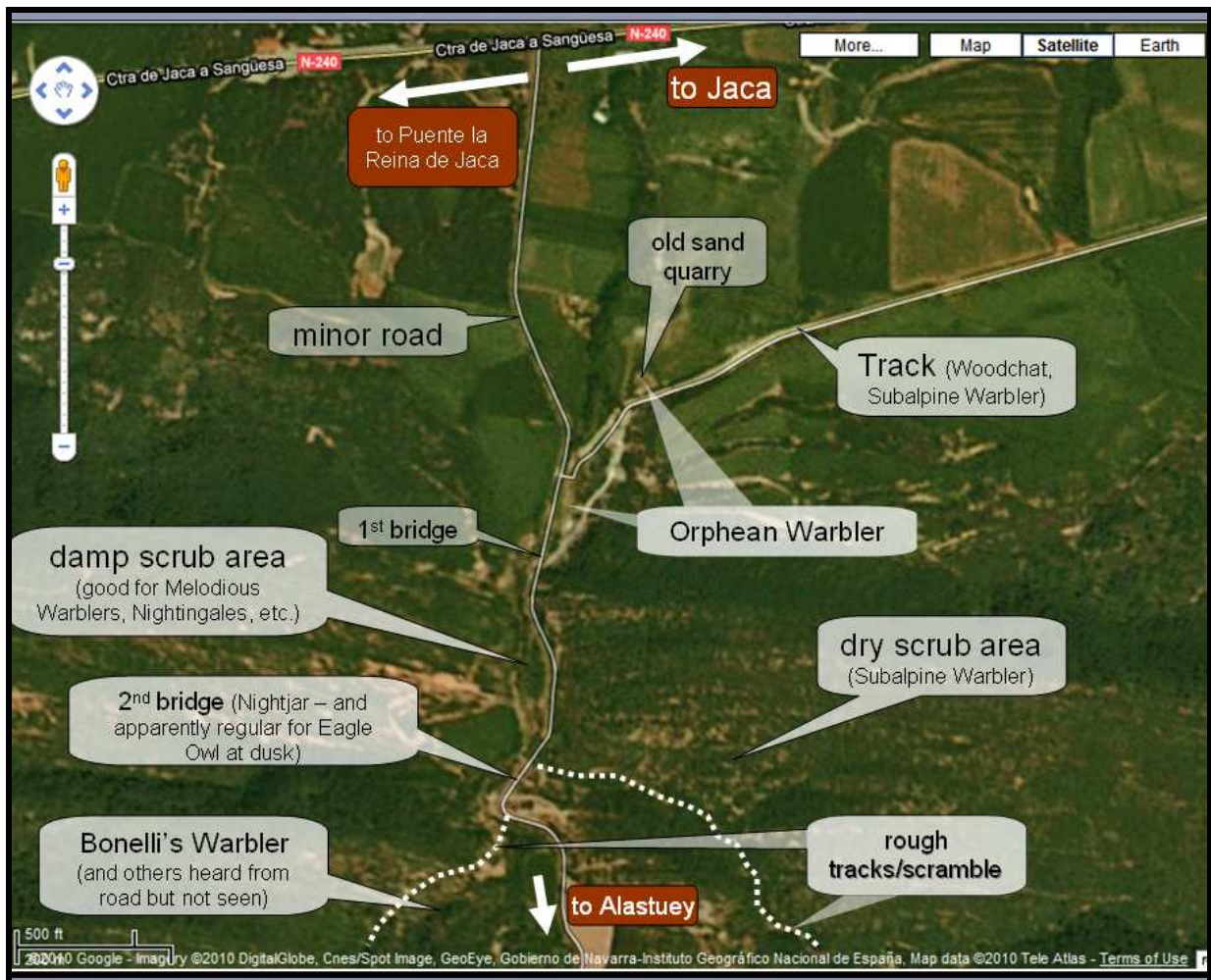
One additional site, the road to Alastuey (west of Jaca), proved to be highly productive and is detailed on map 3.



**Map 1: Main areas visited.**



**Map 2: Sites visited in Jaca area, northern Aragón**



**Map 3: Detail of birding area along road to Alastuey**

## Itinerary

### 4 June

My flights got into Girona shortly before midnight on 3<sup>rd</sup> June. I then drove through the night and arrived at the El Planerón site at Las Estepas de Belchite in the early hours (site AR12 in Rebane and Garcia, 2008 and see map on p. 248 of West, 2004). The very first bird I saw of the whole trip was a Red-necked Nightjar which lifted off the track in the car headlights as I pulled off the road. After a couple of hours sleep in the car I strolled very slowly down the track way-marked with a Dupont's Lark silhouette. The area was buzzing with Crested, Calandra, Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed Larks and, fortunately, a small number of Dupont's gave good but generally rather brief views. A couple of Southern Grey Shrikes and a couple of small parties (single fingers) of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse in flight were also much appreciated.

En route to Jaca, Rock Sparrows were seen a few kms down the road from El Planerón, just outside the village of Quinto and several Black Kites, two or three Booted Eagles and ubiquitous White Storks were seen from the motorway approaching Zaragoza from the east. After finding the campground and a siesta, I headed up to San Juan de la Peña (site AR3 in Rebane and Garcia, 2008). Several hours of walking slowly through woodland trails in this area was not especially productive but Black Woodpecker was seen at the viewpoint along the trail north from the new monastery (and another was heard in woods to the south)



**Rock Thrush, Astún, 5 June**

### 5 June

Most of the day was spent around the small ski resort of Astún and the nearby border crossing at Pto. de Somport. Two Lammergeier were seen several times in flight over the valley and perched up high on the NW side of the valley. Citril Finch was only seen in small pines by the border crossing while a male Rock Thrush was eventually found singing from the top of one of the ski lift towers along the track leading further up the main valley past the ski resort area. Other highlights in the area included Choughs (both types), Golden Eagle, Water Pipit and Rock Bunting.



**Golden Eagle, Astún, 5 June**



**Lammergeier, Astún, 5 June**

**6 June**

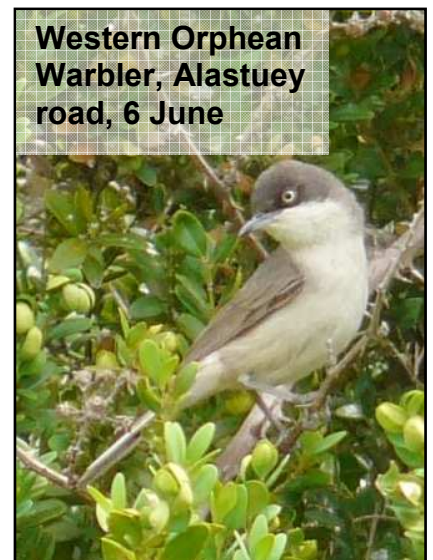
Several hours were spent slowly wandering along tracks along the lower part of the road to Alastuey (see map 3). This produced good views of Western Bonelli's Warbler and Western Orphean Warbler as well as a long list of other noteworthy birds. The best of these were Subalpine Warbler, Nightingale, Melodious Warbler and Wood chat Shrike. The remainder of the afternoon and evening was spent walking trails along the southern side of the N240 between Jaca and Puente la Reina de Jaca. There is a series of well marked trails in this area and they can be accessed at several points along this valley including from the start of the road leading south from the N240 towards Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña. Exploring these produced further Nightingales and Melodious Warblers, Rock Sparrow, Woodlark and Golden Oriole.



**Western Bonelli's Warbler, Alastuey road, 6 June**

**7 June**

A drive up the famous Valle de Hecho (site AR1 in Rebane and Garcia, 2008). I looked for an hour or so for Wallcreeper on the cliffs along the path past the Garbadito Refuge but without success. Egyptian Vulture and Alpine Swift were highlights here. Back at the forest clearing at the Refuge, a small party of Citril Finches gave excellent views. The remainder of the day was spent exploring a little further up this valley and then down into Valle de Ansó. Later, at dusk, I waited along the Alastuey road at a regular Eagle Owl site but without success. However a European Nightjar was seen and heard).



**Western Orphean Warbler, Alastuey road, 6 June**

**8 June**

Drive back to Girona for an afternoon flight back to Edinburgh. Hoopoe and Yellow-legged Gull noted en route.



**Citril Finch, Pto. de Somport, 5 June**



**Melodious Warbler, Alastuey road, 6 June**

## Systematic List

- Mallard:** Seen in lower Valle de Hecho on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Red-legged Partridge:** Two at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Quail:** Heard along trail near village of Binacua.
- Grey Heron:** Seen in Lower Valle de Hecho on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- White Stork:** Seen on nests from car in Zaragoza area on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Lammergeier:** At least two seen several times at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Griffon Vulture:** Seen at most sites away from the plains.
- Egyptian Vulture:** One at the crag at Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Golden Eagle:** An immature seen well at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Booted Eagle:** Two or three noted from car near Zaragoza and seen at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Red Kite:** Seen at most sites visited and regularly noted from the car.
- Black Kite:** Noted from car near Zaragoza on 4<sup>th</sup> and also seen along trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Marsh Harrier:** From car between El Planerón and Qunito on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Buzzard:** Along trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Kestrel:** Seen at several sites.
- Yellow-legged Gull:** Noted en route back to Girona on 8<sup>th</sup>.
- Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Single figures in flight at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Woodpigeon:** Noted at several sites.
- Collared Dove:** Noted from car near Zaragoza.
- Turtle Dove:** Seen from trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Cuckoo:** Heard at several sites.
- Nightjar:** One seen and heard at the Alastuey road at dusk on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Red-necked Nightjar:** One at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Swift:** Noted only at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Alpine Swift:** A party of four at the crag near Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Hoopoe:** One seen from car en route back to Girona on 8<sup>th</sup>.
- Bee-eater:** One at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup> and noted on trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Black Woodpecker:** One seen and a second bird heard at Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Green Woodpecker:** Heard at Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Noted from car en route to Jaca on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Crested Lark:** Noted at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Thekla Lark:** At least two at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Woodlark:** Seen from trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Short-toed Lark:** Common (c.20 seen) at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Lesser Short-toed Lark:** Very Common (c.50 seen) at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Calandra Lark:** Several (c.10 seen) at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Dupont's Lark:** At least three at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Crag Martin:** Noted at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup> and around the crag past Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Swallow:** Seen at several sites.
- House Martin:** Seen at several sites.
- Water Pipit:** Singing birds at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.
- White Wagtail:** Noted at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Grey Wagtail:** Noted at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Dipper:** One at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.
- Dunnock:** Noted only at Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Robin:** Noted at several sites.
- Nightingale:** c.8, including several in song, at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup> and also noted along trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.



**Black Redstart:** See at Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 4<sup>th</sup>, at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup> and at Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Wheatear:** One at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Stonechat:** Seen along trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Song Thrush:** Noted at Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Mistle Thrush:** Noted at Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Blackbird:** Seen at several sites.

**Rock Thrush:** A singing male at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Garden Warbler:** Noted at Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 4<sup>th</sup> and at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Blackcap:** Noted at several sites.

**Western Orphean Warbler:** Excellent views of c.4 birds at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Subalpine Warbler:** At least three at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Cetti's Warbler:** One at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Melodious Warbler:** c. 5, including several in song, at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup> and noted along the trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Western Bonelli's Warbler:** c.4 singing at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup> but good views only of one bird.

**Chiffchaff:** Noted at several sites.

**Firecrest:** Heard and seen along the approach road to Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Wren:** Noted only at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Spotted Flycatcher:** Noted at Camping Pirineos on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Tit:** Seen at several sites.

**Coal Tit:** Noted at several sites.

**Blue Tit:** Seen at several sites.

**Crested Tit:** Noted at Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 4<sup>th</sup> and at Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Nuthatch:** Noted at Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Treecreeper:** Birds at Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 4<sup>th</sup> and upper Valle de Hecho on 7<sup>th</sup> appeared to be this species.

**Southern Grey Shrike:** Two at El Planerón on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Woodchat Shrike:** One watched at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Magpie:** Several sites.

**Jay:** Several sites.

**Chough:** Single figures at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup> and around the crag at Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Alpine Chough:** Single figures at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Carrion Crow:** Noted at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Raven:** Noted at several sites.

**Spotless Starling:** Noted from car near Zaragoza on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Golden Oriole:** One seen from the car just west of Jaca on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**House Sparrow:** Seen in several villages.

**Rock Sparrow:** Seen from car just outside (near El Planerón) on 4<sup>th</sup> and on trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Chaffinch:** Seen at several sites.

**Linnet:** Seen at several sites.

**Goldfinch:** Noted at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Citril Finch:** Two at Pto. de Somport on 5<sup>th</sup> and c.8 at Garbadito Refuge on 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Serin:** Common at several sites including at the campsite.

**Cirl Bunting:** Seen at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup> and from trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Yellowhammer:** Seen at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup> and at the Alastuey road on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Corn Bunting:** Seen along trail at start of road to Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Rock Bunting:** A singleton at Astún on 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Woodchat Shrike, Alastuey road,  
6 June**

