

Spain 2012 – August 03 – 18

(and some notes on Spain 2011 – August 14 – 20)



The king of the mountain slopes overlooks his territory



The king of the Mediterranean forest sniffs a flower (or seems to do so...).

Intro

Our yearly holiday in search of mammals and other wildlife brought us to southern Spain. We choose Spain because of several reasons of which the most important was that we had only time for a short summer break and there were several highlights on the Spanish wildlife list that we wanted to see (including orcas that can be seen in de Mediterranean sea in summer and early autumn, making summer a particularly interesting moment to visit Spain). While the beaches of Spain attract many tourists because of the hot and sunny weather, we feared that the summer temperatures might render our trip less successful. Luckily it turned out that this would not be the case.

In 2011 Stefi already visited Extremadura during a couple of days. At the end of this report a bit of information on this trip is given.

We put our sightings and some extra information in this trip report. Hopefully it can be useful for mammal-and-other-wildlife fanatics that want to visit the area in the future!

Tim and Stefi

General info

We flew with Brussels Airlines from Brussels to Madrid. We hired a car through www.rentalcars.com. We had to pick up the car at the desk of Budget. We were not so happy with the service. All cars were rather expensive (€300+). We selected the “additional driver” option while booking online. The price stayed the same, so we thought this option was included in the price. It turned out that it wasn’t (€70 extra). We got the car with a full tank and had to deliver it back as empty as possible. They charged €80 for the full tank, while the normal price for this was around €45. The only good thing was that we got an upgrade (Skoda Fabia, instead of Nissan Micra). Luckily we had this somewhat larger car, as travelling with all our stuff would have been unpleasant otherwise. We only booked the hotel for the first night (as we arrived after midnight) and the hotel in Sierra Andújar (because we certainly did not want to risk not finding a place to stay in this less touristy area). We managed to get around perfectly well without any other reservations. There are plenty of hotels, of all price categories and they were seldom fully booked.

Itinerary



Trip outline

Region visited	Main targets
Sierra de Andújar	Iberian lynx, genet, otter, garden dormouse, mouflon, birds
Sierra Nevada	Southeastern Spanish ibex
Ronda	Southeastern Spanish ibex, Raptors
Tarifa-Gibraltar	Orca, Barbary macaque
Rota	European chameleon
Coto Doñana	Iberian lynx
Trujillo	Birds, Iberian hare
Monfragüe	Raptors (Spanish imperial eagle, black vulture, black-winged kite, eagle owl,...) and otter
Sierra de la Culebra	Wolf
Villafáfila	Great bustard
Sierra de Gredos	Western Spanish ibex

Mammal list

Common name	Scientific name	Location
western European hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	Sierra de la Culebra
Daubenton's bat	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	Sierra de Andújar
greater mouse-eared bat	<i>Myotis myotis</i>	Sierra de Andújar
bat sp.		At many locations
red fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Sierra de Andújar, Monfragüe
beech marten	<i>Martes foina</i>	Monfragüe
Eurasian otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	Sierra de Andújar
Eurasian badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	Monfragüe
Egyptian mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>	Coto Doñana
Common genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	Sierra de Andújar
Iberian lynx	<i>Lynx pardinus</i>	Sierra de Andújar
roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	Ronda, Sierra de la Culebra
red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Sierra de Andújar, Ronda, Coto Doñana, Monfragüe
fallow deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	Sierra de Andújar
wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Sierra de Andújar, Coto Doñana, Monfragüe
mouflon	<i>Ovis aries</i>	Sierra de Andújar
Gredos Spanish ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica victoriae</i>	Sierra de Gredos
Southeastern Spanish ibex	<i>Capra pyrenaica hispanica</i>	Sierra Nevada, Ronda
red squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Sierra de la Culebra
Garden dormouse	<i>Eliomys quercinus</i>	Sierra de Andújar
wood mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	Sierra de Andújar
house mouse	<i>Mus musculus</i>	Trujillo - 2011
rat sp.	<i>Rattus sp.</i>	Monfragüe
Southern water vole (?)	<i>Arvicola sapidus</i>	Huelva - roadkill
European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Sierra de Andújar, Coto Doñana, Monfragüe
Iberian hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>	Monfragüe, Trujillo - 2011

Bird list with most interesting species (location of best sightings is given)

Common name	Scientific name	Dutch name	Location
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Rode Patrijs	Sierra de Andújar, Monfragüe
White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	Witkopeend	Laguna Dulce
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	Flamingo	Laguna Dulce
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Zwarte Ooievaar	Monfragüe
European White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Gewone Ooievaar	Laguna Dulce, Tarifa
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Koereiger	Huelva
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Kleine Torenvalk	Trujillo
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Rode Wouw	Tarifa
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Zwarte Wouw	Tarifa - hundreds, migrating
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Grijze wouw	Ronda
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Aasgier	Monfragüe
Eurasian Griffon	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Vale Gier	Trujillo, Monfragüe, Sierra de Andújar
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Monniksgier	Trujillo, Monfragüe, Sierra de Andújar
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	Slangenarend	Trujillo, Monfragüe, Villafáfila
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	Grauwe kiekendief	Sierra de la Culebra, Villafáfila
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Steenarend	Sierra Nevada, Villafáfila, Monfragüe, Trujillo
Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	Spaanse keizerarend	Sierra de Andújar, Monfragüe
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	Dwergarend	Ronda, Monfragüe
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	Grote Trap	Villafáfila, Trujillo
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	Oehoe	Monfragüe
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	Bosuil	Ronda, Monfragüe
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Steenuil	Sierra de Andújar, Trujillo
Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>	Moorse Nachtzwaluw	Sierra de Andújar, Monfragüe
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	Alpengierzwaluw	Desfiladero de Despeñaperros
White-rumped Swift	<i>Apus caffer</i>	Kaffergierzwaluw	Desfiladero de Despeñaperros, Sierra de Andújar
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Bijeneter	Sierra de Andújar, Trujillo, Monfragüe
Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Hop	Sierra de Andújar, Coto Doñana
Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Zuidelijke Klapekster	Trujillo
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	Roodkopklauwier	Trujillo, Coto Doñana, Ronda
Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	Blauwe Ekster	Camping Monfragüe

Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Alpenkraai	Ronda
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Raaf	Monfragüe
Red-Rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Roodstuitzwaluw	Trujillo, Desfiladero de Despeñaperros
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	Rotszwaluw	Desfiladero de Despeñaperros
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Staartmees	Sierra de Andújar
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	Kalanderleeuwerik	Trujillo
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	Kleine Zwartkop	Rota
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	Provençaalse grasmus	Sierra de Andújar, Sierra de la Culebra
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	Zwarte Spreeuw	Trujillo
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Blauwe Rotslijster	Monfragüe, Sierra de Andújar
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	Cirlgors	Sierra de Andújar

Amphibian-Reptile list

Common name	Scientific name	Location
Frog	<i>Pelophylax sp.</i>	Sierra de la Culebra
Painted frog	<i>Discoglossus sp</i>	Trujillo
Stripeless tree frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>	Trujillo
Tree frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>	Sierra de la Culebra
Western Spadefoot Toad	<i>Pelobates cultripes</i>	Sierra de la Culebra
Iberian rock lizard	<i>Iberolacerta monticola</i>	Trujillo, Sierra de la Culebra
Ocellated lizard	<i>Timon lepidus</i>	Sierra de Andújar
Schreiber's lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus schreiberi</i>	Sierra de la Culebra
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	Trujillo, Ronda, Monfragüe
European chameleon	<i>Chamaeleo chamaeleon</i>	Rota
Snake sp.		Sierra de la Culebra
Spanish pond turtle	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>	Trujillo

Others

Common name	Scientific name	Location
mantis	<i>Empusa pennata</i>	Sierra de Andújar
mantis	<i>Mantis religiosa</i>	Trujillo
scorpion	<i>Buthus occitanus</i>	Laguna El Portil
death's-head hawk moth	<i>Acherontia atropos</i>	Trujillo
scarce swallowtail	<i>Iphiclidides podalirius</i>	Alhambra - Grenada
grasshopper	<i>Ephippiger sp.</i>	Madrid

Extra Site descriptions (see also text for more/other information)

Sierra de Andújar

This site has been described very well by Lee Dingain:

(http://www.mammalwatching.com/Palearctic/Otherreports/LD%20sierra_de_Andújar_spain_2010.pdf)

When coming from Andújar, road A-1208 leads to the interesting area. This road passes the “Los Pinos” hotel just before a road crossing.

At this crossing, the road to the right (JH-5002) leads to the first great site for wildlife watching. This first site is a dirt road leading to the Embalse del Jándula (JH-5004 - in good condition but drive slowly). This road is also referred to as the “La Lancha road” or the “Los Escoriales” road. The dirt road passes through some nice habitat – first more agricultural landscape and then some small valleys with trees. It passes a large valley which offers a very wide view. Most lynx sightings are reported from the lookouts along this valley (bring a telescope!). Further down the road there is a small lake and a dam. Passed the dam, there is a small tunnel. Bats use the holes in the roof of this tunnel as roosts. Road JH-5002 itself also offers nice opportunities for wildlife watching but holds a bit more traffic.

When taking a left turn at the crossing, one passes some more nice habitat but as the road is relatively curvy and there is a substantial amount of traffic, it is not very suitable for wildlife watching. The road passes a narrow bridge. Just after the bridge there is a dirt road on the right. This dirt road is the Encinarejo Trail which leads along the Río Andújar towards the Embalse de El Encinarejo. Next to the dirt road there are some picnic areas. The track is easily drivable but may be muddy in wet conditions. It is not very long but offers some nice spotlighting opportunities. There is also a higher position which offers lookout opportunities over the habitat on the other side of the river. Lynx sightings are often reported from this site and the river below holds otters.

Rota

In this small coastal town there is a botanical garden called "Jardin Botanico Celistine Mutis". The garden is next to the coastline. To reach the garden, drive into Rota from the west (A-2076) and keep on the main road. The garden is on your right hand side between the town and the beach. The garden is gated and opening hours vary according to the season. When we were there, the garden opened at around 9-10am, the siesta was somewhere between 2-6pm and the garden stayed open until 8pm. It's a small place which holds a population of around 20 chameleons in summer. The staff at the garden was very nice (but only spoke Spanish) and they pointed out individuals in the trees. Chameleons are territorial and the staff had a very clear overview of which trees were occupied by which individual. Especially in summer, the chameleons are relatively active as they are moving around in search of a mate when the heat of the day has passed. The staff assured us that the chameleons in the garden arrive to the site by themselves and are not placed there artificially. It was nice to see how even the Spanish tourists were interested in seeing these wonderful reptiles. Other than chameleons, the garden held a few passerine species and captive turtles. Rota is a popular destination for Spanish tourists. Hotels in town were largely booked out or were very expensive.

Coto Doñana

This famous Parque Nacional is normally not open to visitors. It can be visited by taking a tour in a tourist bus. We don't know whether or not this option is good value for your money as we did not take the tour (too hot during the tour-hours to have a realistic chance to see target wildlife). While the core area of the park must be spectacularly beautiful, we settled for the edges that are "open-access". A brand new road goes from north to south at the boundary of the park. A fence along the road prevents animals (such as the lynx) from crossing and becoming roadkill. There is a lot of traffic on this road but friends of ours saw a lynx behind the fence along this road in winter. We could certainly not spotlight or stop along this road, due to the traffic. The best opportunities for walking and observing wildlife without having to pay or hire a guide are offered by the visitor centers. Due to the heat during our stay in the region, the short trails at these visitor centers were enough for us to fill the time during which temperatures were acceptable. We did not visit the "José Antonio Valverde center". This may however be an interesting place and the road that leads to this center might offer spotlighting opportunities.

It may be important to take into account that Coto Doñana is a delta that prevents direct traffic from Cádiz to Huelva. Whenever travelling in the region, one must always drive around 100km up north to pass by Sevilla.

Trujillo

The plains around this town are good for birds. Many new roads have been built recently, so maps and GPS usually only give information on these new roads, neglecting the older (but very good) roads that are better for quiet driving and wildlife watching. The road towards Santa Martha de Magasca (CC 57.1) offers some nice opportunities for typical species, including great bustards. There is a dirt road into the plains (watch the information sign) which offers the best chances for seeing this large bird. More birds can be seen when driving on towards Monroy (CC128) and on to Talaván (ex 373). The roads back south towards Cáceres can also be productive (CC 41, EX 390). The long dirt road connecting EX 390 and CC 99 passes through some arid habitat which can produce some typical species. This is however a slow road as it is not in great condition.

The road from Monroy to Monfragüe is also productive (EX 390). The road passes a row of large stone pines. In the right season, storks nest in these trees and it is also a good area to look for black-winged kite.

Monfragüe

This national park is very «open». There is no entry fee and the roads through the park are public roads, so they can be used at any time. There are two main roads. One leads through the park from north to south (Ex 208). After the only settlement in the park (Villarreal de San Carlos) a second road leads to the east (CC 911). Both roads offer good opportunities for watching birds. There are several look-outs and stops along both roads. The most spectacular look-out is at Peña Falcon along road EX 208. In the late morning, vultures can be seen soaring by from up close. Along road CC 911 there are other great look-outs that offer the most diverse number of species. Where road CC 911 leaves the park, the landscape becomes more flat and suitable for spotlighting.

Day by day report

Day 1 – 03 August

We arrived in Madrid just before midnight. Picked up our rental car and drove to Pinto, about half an hour south of Madrid, where we had made reservations in a hotel. Some relatively small bats were foraging in the streetlights in front of the hotel but it was impossible for us to ID them.

Day2 – 04 August

We left the hotel after a touristy, but rich breakfast. We drove towards Andújar where we had booked a room at “Los Pinos”. Next to Los Pinos there is another interesting place to stay in the Area called Villa Mathilde. Villa Mathilde is apparently run by biologists and it may be a better place to get information on the area. We were very happy with our stay in Los Pinos as the rooms had air-conditioning (which was useful as we stayed in our room during the hot part of the day to catch up on sleep). From Pinto, we took the highway to get to our destination as fast as possible. We left the highway (A4) in the Parque Nacional Desfiladero de Despeñaperros and enjoyed the fantastic views of the mountains and the first interesting birds (including **white-rumped swift**) on a quieter but very well maintained road. In La Carolina we took a detour (JA 6100) towards the Sierra de Andújar to approach the region from the north.



Just past the village of El Centenillo we saw our first **red deer** in plain daylight (around 5pm) in the forest next to the road. They were relatively shy and quickly ran away. The property around a small ruin on the left side of the road held a **mantis** (*Empusa pennata*) and we found a deer antler there.



Little owl

The rest of the way to our hotel in the Sierra de Andújar was rather uneventful, although the road passed through some very nice habitat and there even were some lookouts. Probably the heat of the day caused most wildlife to hold a siesta. A part of the road was untarred and we advanced relatively slowly. We arrived at the hotel much later than planned. We quickly unpacked and moved to the first lynx lookout on the road to La Lancha. We saw some lynx food

(**rabbits** and **red-legged partridges**) on the way and a little owl. We arrived at around sunset. A **black vulture** was soaring overhead. Unfortunately the look-out only held **red deer** and after a little less than an hour we decided to head back to the hotel for a nice diner. After diner, at around 11pm we drove back to do some spotlighting. We quickly picked up a **wood mouse** that crossed the road. **Red deer** were also seen in relatively large numbers. Closer to Los Escoriales we also saw our first **fallow deer** – a bachelor group. On the dirt road to La Lancha we



quickly picked up a small sounder of **wild boars**. Their fur was very dark but they ran off very fast and we did not manage to take a picture. In one of the trees in the cattle fields we saw eyeshine of a small mammal. It turned out to be our first **garden dormouse**! We had brought some traps to catch this species, but as we had seen one in its natural habitat, we decided not to use the traps anymore. We saw many more deer and some **rabbits**. An owl flew across the road and judging from its size, it was probably a **tawny owl**. On the way back to the hotel we saw a **fox** and that was it for the first night. We were a bit disappointed that we hadn't seen the lynx yet and we were even more anxious to see this wonderful species the next day.

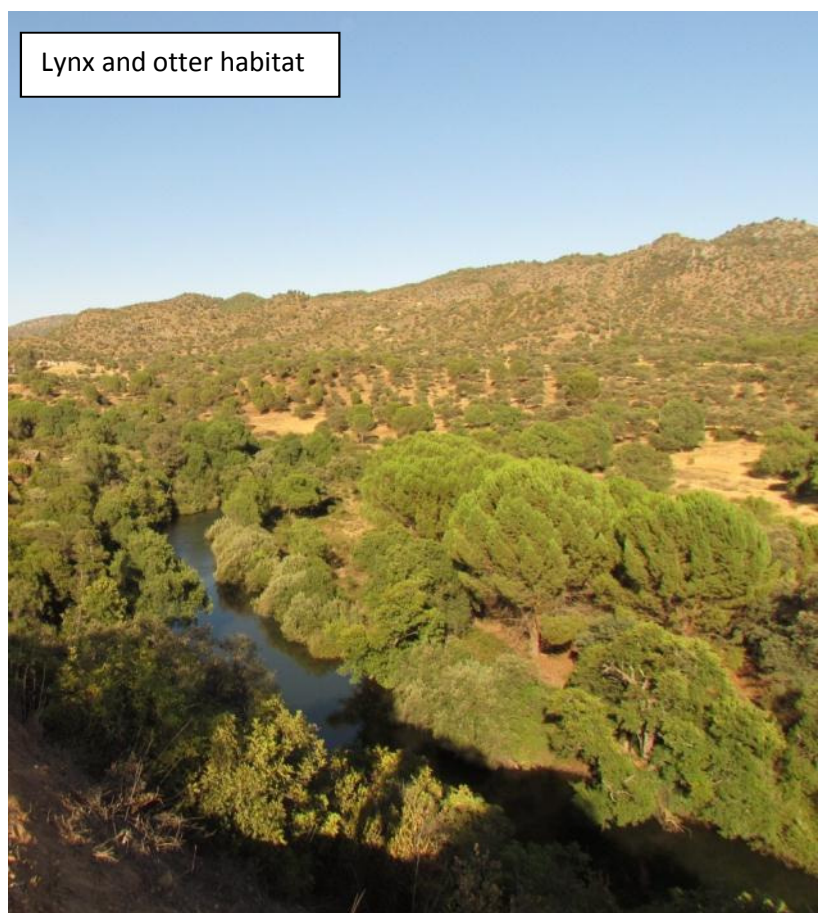


Day 3 – 05 August

We got up at around 5am to get to the lynx viewpoint at the Encinajero trail before sunrise. We arrived well in the dark. At the far end of the picnic area just after entering the trail we picked up our first eyeshine. A medium-sized mammal sat crouched on the ground. A quick look with the binoculars revealed a relatively long tail which indicated that we had certainly not seen a lynx. Then we saw that the animal had a spotted fur, hence it was also clearly not a fox. After a few seconds the mammal got up and we could now clearly see that it was a **genet**. A great start of the day and at once we knew that it paid off to get up early. Unfortunately it quickly ran into the bushes before we had time to take a picture and we did not see it anymore.

We saw some **red deer** and a few **rabbits** before we reached the dam. At the dam we turned around. It was still dark and we decided to head back to the lynx look-out to wait for the first daylight. On the way we saw a small sounder of wild boars that immediately rushed off. A little bit further we picked up an interesting eyeshine – closer to the ground than for example a red deer and larger than a fox. The animal only looked into the flashlight for a second and then slowly walked on. With the binoculars we could clearly make out the shape of a **lynx** strolling by! We saw the spotted fur, the large, round head and the short tail. Unfortunately the lynx quickly disappeared behind a hill. Later that day (in daylight) we noticed that the lynx had been walking on a firebreak road which only ran parallel to the road for a short stretch before winding behind a hill and some trees further away from the street. Although it was a short sighting, we were very happy: one hour up and 2 main targets had already been achieved!

Shortly after we arrived at the lynx lookout it started getting light and we saw some red and fallow deer in the distance. An **otter** was calling in the river below, but it was hidden in the vegetation that bordered the river. Suddenly it swam across a part of the river, but it quickly dived and we only saw a glimpse of it. A bit later the otter showed better and we could clearly see the back of its head and the small ears as it swam across the river below. Apparently the river dam would be opened the next night, causing the water temperature to change and the fish to swim further downstream. If this happens, the otters follow the fish and cannot be seen anymore. Hence, we were very lucky to see them on that day.



Red-legged partridge



After this third great sighting (all before 8am!) we decided to try our luck at the other lynx look-out. We saw some red-legged partridges on the way. Just before reaching the wide valley, we saw a **rabbit** cross the road and through the bushes we could make out the shape of something far larger following the rabbit. We quickly accelerated and just behind the bush we had a clear view of a great **lynx** sneaking away between some rocks.



A few meters further he stopped but he was not interested in us at all. He just sat there, staring – probably into the direction that the rabbit ran away. Only after more than five minutes he granted us the honour of turning around and gazing at us. The great encounter ended when the lynx slowly got up and strolled away. He jumped the rocks which such ease! A truly majestic animal!



On the way back to the hotel to take a well-deserved nap, we still saw a pair of **Spanish imperial eagles**, soaring among the many vultures. What a morning!



Later that day we took a ride along the dirt road we had used to reach the Sierra de Andújar. The road was rather unproductive. We only met two guarda civil on motorcycles which stopped us and, only after a long passport control, finally let us go. No idea what they wanted... A short stake-out at the lynx look-out on dirtroad JH-5004 only produced some red deer. Spotlighting that evening was also rather uneventful. We put up our camera trap at the picnic area, using some leftovers from diner as bait, to attract the genet. We enjoyed the many **nightjars** along the trail and then went to our room to get some sleep.



Day 4 – 06 August

We got up early again – not only in hope to get as lucky with the wildlife watching as the day before – but also to pick up our camera trap which was hanging rather exposed at the picnic area. This time we only saw some **red deer**. The bait had attracted a lone visitor; unfortunately it was not the genet but a hungry **fox**.



We then drove to the dam on the other dirt road to investigate the tunnel at the end of the dam in search of bats. On the way we finally saw our first (and only) **mouflons**! We spotted two beautiful males along road JH-5002. They ran a bit up the hill, but stayed around long enough for some pictures.



In the tunnel, we immediately heard the bats. It seems that it is not such a great idea to roost all together, at least not if you plan on getting some good sleep during the day. A group of bats is rather noise and they are interacting all the time... not my idea of a great rest... It was rather difficult to ID the bats and in the end we only saw to species with certainty. Sadly there were no Schreiber's bats around. For more bat pictures and to help us with ID'ing the bats:

<http://mammaling.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/bat-id/>



very dark **Daubenton's bats** 30+ (above)

greater mouse-eared bat - 8 individuals (below)



After the inspection of the tunnel, we drove on to the next location: the Sierra Nevada. As we drove back along the dirt road, we saw two little owls and on the walls surrounding the cattle fields along the dirt road, we spotted a beautiful, large **ocelated lizard** and some more birds.



The drive to the Sierra Nevada was rather boring and uneventful. We choose a hotel just outside of Granada which was ok (hotel Don Gonzalo). After a short visit to the grounds of the Alhambra (some bats were flying around at dusk)), we had dinner and went to bed.

Day 5 – 07 August

Today we wanted to drive into the Sierra Nevada to see Spanish ibex in the morning and to visit the Alhambra in the afternoon. In the morning we discovered that

the Alhambra only allows a limited number of visitors each day and that it is best to book tickets well in advance or to arrive at the entrance well before opening hours. The website told us that pre-booked tickets were already sold out for the next couple of days. We had not booked and as we had also been lazy and gotten up late, it didn't look so good for our plan of the day. As we did not plan on staying in the area for a long time, we decided to first try our luck with the Alhambra. The line at the ticket booth was already very long, but we found some nice girls that by accident had bought a double set of tickets, so we could arrange to get it. It was very pretty, so certainly a "must do" when visiting the region!



Bat sp.



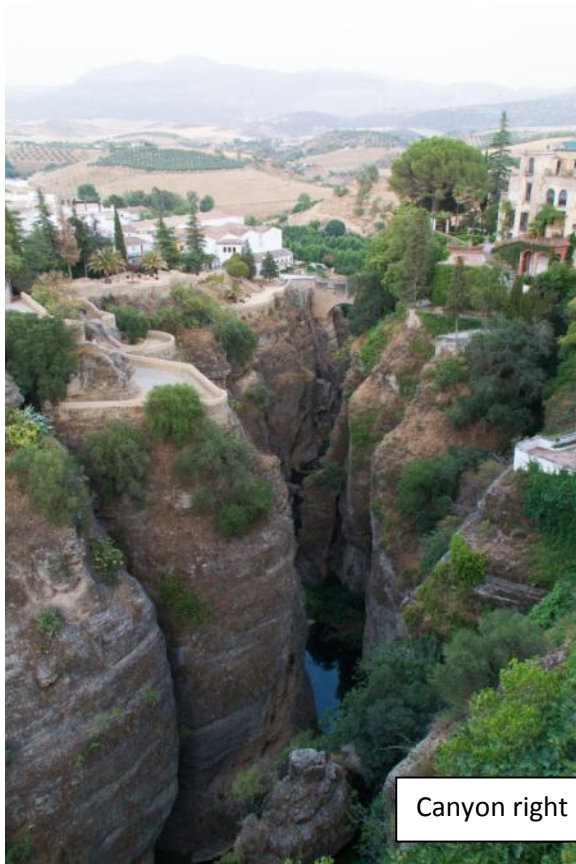
Inside Alhambra

In the afternoon we finally went up the mountains (road A395). We quickly spotted a pair of **golden eagles** soaring above our heads. The road went through some very nice habitat. The road goes all the way up to a village (Pradollano) which mainly attracts tourists during the winter season for skiing. In summer, the village was extremely quiet, almost spooky. There was one ski-lift which was still operated and we wanted to take it up as we hadn't seen any ibex yet, nor had we seen any habitat that seemed particularly good for ibex to us. The price, however, was so high and the temperature was unpleasantly hot, so we decided to give up on the ibex. We took one other road which went a bit further up, towards the Observatorio Astronómico (road A4025?), and while driving this road, we suddenly spotted a female **ibex** walking on a hill next to the road. Somehow we managed to lose sight of her, so we only saw her for a short while, but it clearly was an ibex. With the ibex on our list, we started our relatively long drive towards Ronda.

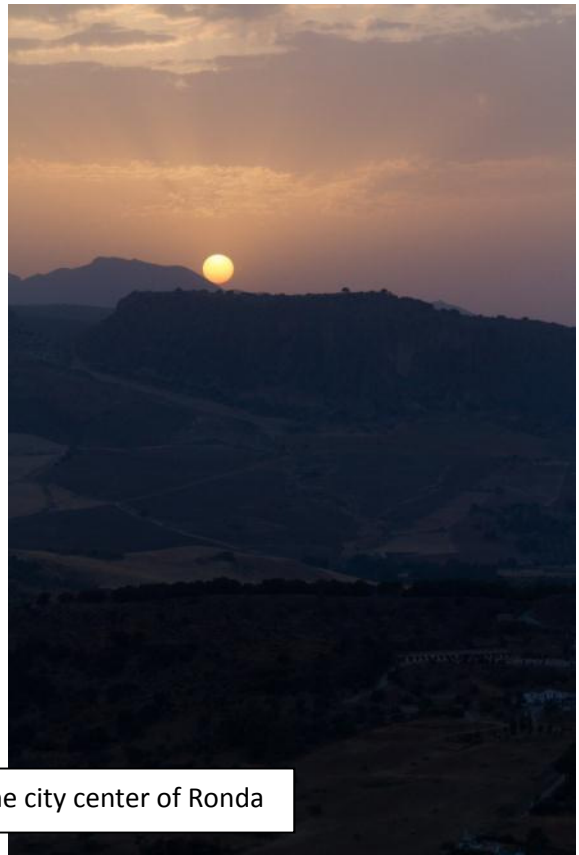


Along the road we saw a dead **Iberian hare** close to Laguna Dulce. At this laguna we stopped for some self-brought tapas. The laguna held a large group of **storks**, some **flamingos** and even some **white-headed ducks**, although most birds were relatively far away. In Ronda, we stayed in a hotel just out of town called Sierra Hidalga, which had a nice pool and was cheaper than the hotels in town. We enjoyed sundown at the spectacular El Tajo canyon on which the city is built. **Red-billed choughs** were flying around in search of a good spot to sleep and during dinner in a restaurant with a nice view, a **gecko** was inspecting our food choices from up the wall.





Canyon right in the city center of Ronda



Day 6 – 08 August

Today we took a driving trip in the hills of Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema surrounding Ronda. It was a nice trip which started off with a booted eagle that closely inspected us and our car. There are several caves with prehistoric rock paintings. We just missed a tour by minutes (Cueva de la Pileta) and did not bother to wait 2 hours for the next tour, but it seemed nice to go and see the paintings...



Booted eagle

We drove from Ronda to the Embalse de de Montejaque. The road (MA8403) went through some very beautiful and spectacular landscapes. Along road, just before reaching the Embalse (when coming from Benoaján), we suddenly saw a goat on a big rock on a rocky slope. We parked the car and walked back to the spot where we had seen the goat. It turned out to be a beautiful female

Spanish ibex. After a few minutes, the animal noticed us and started to move. We then saw that there were actually two adult females, both with a young. They slowly moved along the rocks, with great agility. We were very happy with this sighting, which was much better than in the Sierra

Nevada. The Spanish ibex in these mountains are considered the same subspecies as the ones in the Sierra Nevada.



We followed MA8401 south until Cortes de la Frontera. A bit after this town, we took a left turn to a vulture look-out. This road was a very nice slow, tarred, road through a forested area, which eventually leads to a town called El Colmenar. We put up the camera trap here and decided to come back in the evening for some spotlighting. We took a dirt road towards Ubrique, which also lead through some nice Spanish landscapes.



Then we drove towards Zahara and back to Ronda. Along the way, we spotted a **black-winged kite** which had just caught a lark. The raptor was a bit shy, but by slowly driving past the bird, we managed to get a picture.



Spotlighting that evening was not very productive. We drove the stretch from road A373 just after Cortes de la Frontera to the crossing towards El Colmenar and back, but all we saw were many **red deer**, a hunting **tawny owl** and two **roe deer**. The camera trap did not record any activity. A bit disappointed we went back to the hotel for a short night.



Day 7 – 09 August

We drove from Ronda to Gibraltar to see the Barbary macaques. As we arrived at the peninsula we got stuck in a major traffic jam. We never really managed to figure out why there was so much traffic and whether all those people were trying to get onto ferries or to the famous rock of Gibraltar. We got so fed up with the traffic that we decided to go straight away to Tarifa for whale watching. Along the way we saw large numbers of **black kites**, indicating that the bird migrations were happening just at that time.

Upon our arrival in Tarifa we quickly found the whale watching agencies. There are several but apparently the best are Firmm, Turmares and Whale watching Tarifa. It was not busy at all, so all the fuzz they make on their website about booking well in advance seemed a bit exaggerated. The main goal for our visit here were the orcas. One or two families of orcas are known to visit the Strait of Gibraltar every year in summer to feed on tuna. These families have learnt to snatch the fishes off the lines of fishermen. The trips to see them are often successful and the websites of the tour operators show very promising beautiful pictures of these large predators. Next to orcas, one can also see several species of dolphins and earlier in the seasons, whales (sperm whales and others) can be seen. Unfortunately, we quickly discovered that the winds were too strong to go out to see the orcas. The unpredictable winds make whale watching not so reliable here. We were still deciding whether or not we would also take a trip to see just the dolphins (which stay closer to the shore and hence trips are a little bit less often cancelled due to winds) as due to the most recent weather forecast all trips were cancelled. No more boats could leave the harbor for seeing dolphins or orcas that day or the next two days. As Tarifa was not such a nice town, we decided not to stick around but to move on and drive back a few days later, provided that the winds were more in our favor. We drove on to Rota near Cádiz. There is a botanical garden in this town which is a stronghold for **European chameleon**, a species that was high on our wish list. We arrived in Rota at around 6pm, just after the siesta. We slowly walked through the garden, closely inspecting the trees. After about 30 minutes we spotted a chameleon in an oak tree!

They are so great and much larger than we had expected. After this nice find, we talked with the lady that was a part of the staff. She was very nice and extremely fond of the chameleons. She showed us two or three more individuals, which were all clearly visible, but relatively high up the trees. She also told us that the skin of chameleons apparently shines back at you when using a flashlight, a bit like eyeshine.

After the visit to the garden, we drove on as hotels in Rota were either fully booked or very expensive. In Jerez de la Frontiera we found a good and much cheaper hotel (H2 hotel) with a view on the football stadium of town.



Day 8 – 10 August

Today's destination was the famous Coto Doñana National Park. Upon arrival, we encountered very unpleasantly hot temperatures, the hottest so far (34°+). We visited the small town of El Rocio, just at the border of the park. Here we found a nice hotel called Pequeño Rocío. It looked very expensive, but (probably due to the limited number of tourists) the price was just a little bit higher than the other hotels we had stayed. The best part was that the hotel had a pool. Although it was crowded with screaming Spanish kids, it was just the perfect place to hang out on a very hot afternoon. At around 7pm, we dragged ourselves out of the pool and into the car to do some wildlife watching. It was still very hot, but we quickly learned that that wouldn't change before sundown. We went to the Acebuche visitor center. There was a short trail with several observation cabins along an area that may be flooded in the wetter season. The cabins gave some shadow, so we were happy to quickly move from cabin to cabin. On the way we saw a group of four **wild boar** piglets.



They clearly had not imagined that any crazy tourist would go out with this heat, so it took them a while to notice us. As they did, they quickly ran off. At the end of the trail there was a cabin overlooking a pond which still held some water. We saw some **red deer** and a red **fox** that came to drink.



We then walked the longer part of the trail, which was a loop. We saw a couple of **rabbits** and at one observatory point we startled a group of 4 **red deer**.



As we were heading back to the visitor center at around 9pm, Tim suddenly stopped and whispered “mongoose”. An **Egyptian mongoose** was crossing the trail just in front of us! He stopped for a short moment to look at us and then ran into the bushes. This was a great ending of our short walk! The ranger at the visitor center told us that mongooses are regularly seen here on quiet moments. The visitor center is only open until 10pm. After 10pm, the gate at the main road is closed. This is unfortunate, because the grounds around the visitor center and the road that leads to the visitor center from the main road clearly offer some great spotlighting opportunities. If the gate also only closes at 10pm during winter time, this may be an interesting place for wildlife watching after sundown.



Later that evening we went to the beach to search for scorpions. The park ranger had told us that scorpions are easily found under wood that lies on the beach. We could not find any wood and hence no scorpions, so we went for a great Spanish diner in a local restaurant.

Day 9 – 11 August

Today we called the whalewatching agencies in Tarifa with big hopes for a change of weather and a possible trip the next day. The weather indeed had changes but as the next day it would be Sunday and fishermen don't go out to fish on Sunday and orcas can only be seen when there are fishermen, there would not be a trip the next day. We were disappointed but decided to check back in the next day to see whether we could still go on a trip on Monday and the guy on the phone said that things were looking good for Monday.

Before the heat of the day, we went to take a walk at another visitor center of the Coto Doñana park: Acebron. As we arrived, we quickly learnt that our plan of taking a walk before the sun got too hot, had failed. It was already unpleasantly hot, but as we had gone all the way, we decided to walk anyway, especially as most of the walk was in the shadow. We started a pair of large **wild boars**. We also heard an animal foraging in the fern leaves. It clearly was a medium-sized animal but it wouldn't show itself... maybe it was a mongoose (from what we could hear, the way of moving reminded us of



mongooses in Africa....) but maybe it wasn't, we'll never know. After our hot walk, we drove on to Huelva which should be good for reptiles and amphibians. We went to the towns close to Laguna El Portil. On the way we found a large, fat rodent on the road. It was probably a **Southern water vole**. Around this laguna, chameleons should be easy to spot. However, we did not find any. This may have been due to the fact that the warm weather did not promote our motivation too much... An evening stroll around the laguna (with a blacklight lamp) was rewarded with a beautiful **scorpion**! They really glow in the

dark when you point a blacklight on them – great!

Other than that we did not care too much for the place, which was rather dirty and seemed to be used as a lavatory by the dogs of town. We did not manage to find any other interesting creatures. Our lack of experience with reptiles and amphibians surely did not help.



Day 10 – 12 August

Another phone call to the whale watching agency revealed that Monday was also not such a great day for orca watching. It was not entirely clear why this was the case, so we kind of felt that Tuesday and probably even Wednesday would also not be such great days. We then decided to head further north, as planned, instead of hanging around in the southern parts, hoping for the whales. This of course meant that driving back to Tarifa would no longer be possible and we would certainly not see cetaceans on this trip.



We drove up to Trujillo in Extremadura. A short inspection of the large metal toro outside of town delivered some great views of a huge **black vulture**. We also drove into the plains around the town to see more birds – mainly great bustard. We saw some nice birds, but not the bustards.

That evening we had a nice stroll and diner in the medieval town, with some local festivities to celebrate Mother Mary.



Black vulture



Trujillo Plaza Mayor



Lots of geckos on the walls

Day 11 – 13 August

Our destination of the day was the Monfragüe National Park which is famous for its high densities of raptors. We drove there by passing through the plains around Trujillo in search of birds. We saw many nice species, but no again great bustards. Road EX373 towards Talaván crossed a small river with a pond on the left side. We stopped to see the birds along the pond. We also saw **some Spanish terrapins** and in the reeds next to the pond we heard an animal move which could only have been a wild boar. A short inspection under the bridge revealed that this was otter territory. There were tracks everywhere, droppings and eaten freshwater lobsters. We put up the camera trap to catch the creature on film.

Under the bridge we also found a roost of bats (probably **Daubenton's bats**) and a **death's-head hawk moth** (*Acherontia atropos*).



Death's-head hawk moth

Upon arrival in the Monfragüe National Park we got a bungalow with air conditioning at the camping Monfragüe (around 10-20km north of the core of the park). The bungalows are quite expensive, but we got a discount and with the heath outside, the idea of camping did not seem too tempting. There are also some hotels in Plasencia, which is just a few kilometers further. However, we found the road side hotels there very dirty and still expensive. After the heat of the day we visited the main look-out of the park at the Castillo, overlooking the river and an impressive rock wall. We enjoyed the vultures soaring by.



Then we drove towards the eastern entrance of the park, stopping at the different look-outs. We hoped to spot an otter, but we were unlucky. There was very little water in the river/lakes. We did see many **red deer**. At the look-out just before the dam (La Tajodilla), we saw some **red deer** crossing the river. **A red fox** came to drink from the green, smelly water. We saw many more **red deer** and lots of vultures while stopping at all the different look-outs.



We stayed at the last look-out before leaving the park (Portilla del Tiétar) until it was dark. We then set off to go spotlighting. We drove out of the park – direction Bazagone – and back a couple of times. Just after we started, we saw a **badger** cross the road. He paused for a short moment to look

at us and then dashed off in the shrubs that bordered the road. A great start of the evening! We saw many **red deer**. They would run along and across the street, stop right in front of the car and take ages to move away. Again we noticed how small they are compared to the red deer in the Ardennes. You would almost mistake them for roe deer. In the fields a bit further down the road we saw a couple of **foxes** and an **Iberian hare**. The foxes, as well as the hare, immediately ran off. Probably hunting is an important cause of death for the animals here. On the way back we saw a female **wild boar** with some large piglets. The long road back to the camping did not deliver any more animals.



Day 12 – 14 August

We spent the whole day in the park. Tim spotted a large rodent with a long tail on a stone wall close to the camping. It was probably a **brown or black rat**. We visited the Castillo again.





We checked the bridge over the rio for bats, but saw only feral pigeons. In 2011, several bats were observed under this bridge in the afternoon as they were trying to find a spot to roost.

In the afternoon we saw a habituated **fox** at the mirador between Tajadilla and La Bascula. Apparently the fox can be seen here almost always.

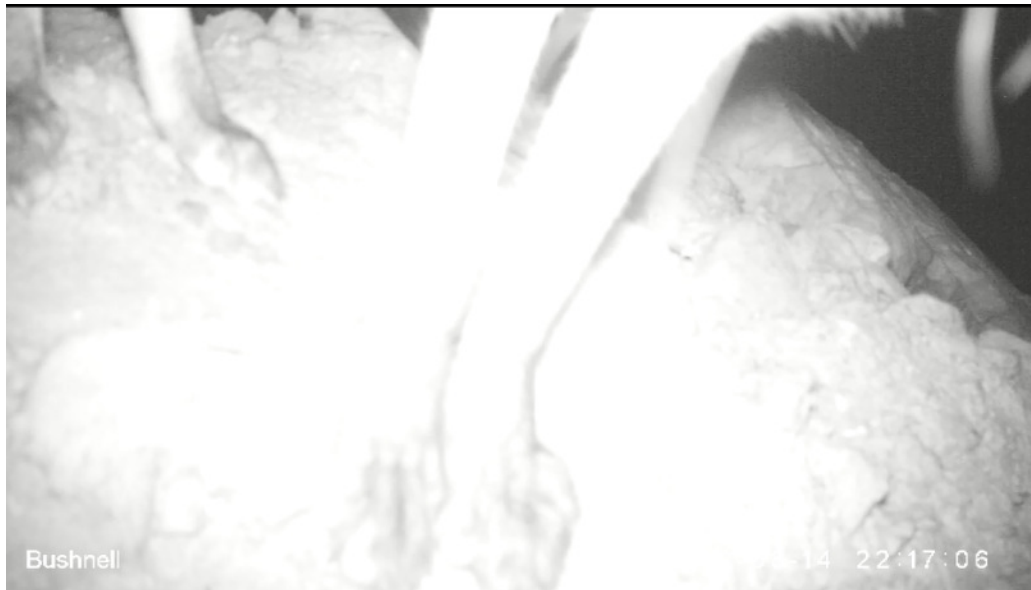
We again saw quite some red deer and some interesting birds, including a **black vulture** at La Bascula. We had a siesta and in the late afternoon we spent some time at Portilla Tietar. Just before sundown, a large **Spanish imperial eagle** came sailing by and as it was almost dark, we saw an **eagle owl** which perched nicely in the open on a rock. Spotlighting produced two **stone martens** (one between La Higuera and Portilla Tietar and one where we had seen the badger the day before). We saw an **Iberian hare** on almost the same spot as the day before. This one did stick around a bit longer. As we were getting everything ready to take a picture, suddenly a **tawny owl** attacked the hare and it ran off – all sadly without any photos of course...

Griffon vulture (left) – Eagle owl (right)



Day 13 – 15 August

We went to pick up the camera trap in the morning. The otter did not show but our camera had caught the attention of a Spanish guy (luckily the camera was well attached!) and a curious **fox**.



Next, a long drive towards the Sierra de la Culebra, just north of Zamora, awaited us. We went there in search of an elusive creature: the wolf. We arrived at around 7pm and found a place to stay in San Pedro de las Herrerías. It was a very nice hotel (casa rural Veniata) with a great atmosphere and the owner knew quite a bit of the wolves. At the reception there was a board with recent wolf sightings. The owner gave us the directions to one of the look-outs for the wolves. This look-out, called “La Pista” is just next to the railway, north of town. The look-out overlooks a large part of land. The sightings are usually quite distant. We even needed a telescope to see red deer, so be sure to bring a telescope when spotting wolves from here or you don’t even need to bother. We spent many hours here, before sunrise and sunset but all we saw were a couple of red and roe deer. This was a bit disappointing, especially as even when a wolf turns up, sightings are most likely to be very distant. The first evening, we went there too early so we had to wait a long time before sightings would become likely. It was pretty cold, quite a difference with the past days! As the good time for the wolves was approaching, suddenly a large group of extremely noisy Spanish people turned up. There were suddenly at least 30 people, among them many children that were playing and screaming. No



sensible wolf would show itself that evening - that much was clear. I guess people that had a paid guide with them must have been even more disappointed than we... Spotlighting in the area was very unproductive for us. We only saw two **red deer** and our only **hedgehog** of the trip during three hours.

Day 14 – 16 August

We got up very early to try for the wolves. We saw a very dark **red squirrel** on the track next to the rail road but no wolves.



Later on, we drove around in the region between road ZA912 and Gallegos del Campo. We found several drinking pools for cattle along a dirt road. Here we saw several frog species and a small snake which got away before we could ID it. Around Ferreras de Arriba we saw a large Schreiber's Green Lizard on the road and along the way we spotted a male **roe deer**. Our last evening also produced no wolves and as spotlighting had been highly unsuccessful the day before, we decided to skip it for that night. Seeing wolves at the look-out seems to be a pure matter of luck.

There are several other spots to see the wolves. Much depends on where bait has been put out. While we were there, it seems that there was no fresh bait laid out for the wolves. Another spot that is mentioned by other wolf-watchers is a concrete plateau (**41°53'17.5"N 6°25'39.2"W**) next to the road towards Flechas. We visited the area in the afternoon. It looked not better or not worse than other spots in the area.

Day 15 – 17 August

We drove on to a region called Villafáfila which is well known for the high densities of birds. We saw many raptors, including a juvenile **golden eagle**, **short-toed eagle**, **Montagu's harrier**,... We also saw a group of **great bustards** – a species the region is most renowned for – but they somehow were startled and flew away.



Short-toed eagle



Wheatear

In the afternoon we drove on to Madrid to catch our flight the next day. We made a detour to pass through the Sierra de Gredos. This mountainous area is located just a couple of hours West of Madrid. In the village of Hoyos del Espino along AV 941 a road into the mountain starts (AV 931). This road leads to a parking lot from which you can start a hike into the mountains. **Gredos Spanish ibex** are regularly seen around the parking lot. We had around 2 hours to see them. As we arrived on the parking lot we saw no animals, so we started to hike a bit up the mountain. After a few hundred meters we saw our first ibex. We also saw a beautiful large male.





We did not hike further up but stayed around the male and saw many more ibex during the two hours we spent there. When we got back to the parking lot, we also saw a group of ibex there. They were all very approachable and we could observe them very well. We then drove back to Madrid and stayed in a hotel close to the airport. We discovered a nice **grasshopper** on the car (*Ephippiger sp.*)



Day 16 – 18 August

Flight back



A master of camouflage...



This one still has to practice a bit on which spots are best for hiding...



Sierra de Andújar



Sierra de la Culebra

2011

In 2011 I spent a couple of days in the region around Trujillo – Monfragüe with my dad, mainly for birdwatching. We saw a.o. **lesser kestrel** on the old road from Trujillo to Cáceres. The road towards Santa Martha de Magasca (CC 57.1) offered **bee-eaters** and **great bustards**. We did a long tour through the plains. Under the bridge of road Ex-390 (Monroy towards Cáceres) we found a dead **stone marten**. We also took a dirt road through some arid habitat (see site descriptions). This road held **pin-tailed sand grouse** and **Calandra lark**.



Along this road we also witnessed an interesting hunting attempt. We were driving as suddenly a



large eagle appeared in the sky (you wonder how those massive birds keep appearing out of nowhere!). It folded its wings, stretched forward its claws and fell out of the sky with a massive speed. Just before reaching the ground, a **hare** catapulted itself right into the air and with one of those hare-typical mid-air direction changing movements, it rushed off and quickly hid under a bush. That was one life saving maneuver. The eagle crashed

into the bushes, looking rather surprised as it crawled up and quickly hovered off. It was an immature **golden eagle**...no early dinner for him today!

We stayed in a finca called Santa Marta south of Trujillo. It was a nice place but in the evening there was some sort of party close by and because the wind blew in our direction, it sounded as if the DJ was right in front of our window. During breakfast, we saw several mice running in the patio (and on the breakfast table). I caught one which turned out to be a **house mouse**, but the tail was too long for it to be an Algerian house mouse. Right outside our window was a **red-rumped swallow** nest, but the chicks had already fledged. There were also plenty of **tree frogs** and a ***Discoglossus*** sp. at the Finca that came out in the evening (around the pool, in the patio, ...).



In Monfragüe, we saw some **rabbits** and quite a few **red deer**. One red deer encounter was memorable. We were sitting on a bench at the picnic area of Tajadilla, hoping to see an eagle owl as it was quickly getting dark. A female was strolling along the picnic area, but keeping her distance. Her calf hadn't noticed us and suddenly jumped right in front of us. There were less than 5 meters between us and the calf. It froze, looking in our direction, but somehow it seemed that it couldn't quite figure out what was going on. Then it put its nose in the air and sniffed carefully. It must have picked up our scent, because immediately thereafter, it ran off.



Bird-wise the visit to the park was very successful, with black vultures at Tajadilla, **black stork** and **Egyptian vulture** at Portilla del Tiétar and many more.

