

Valencia in Autumn

1st - 7th September 2021 Led by Pau Lucio & Jon Dunn



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Day 1 – 1st September – arrival day

Our arrival at Valencia airport passed, as always at this efficient airport, smoothly, with all guests



who'd not travelled out to Spain the day before arriving on time and soon landside and, met by Jon and Pau, swiftly loaded in our comfortable minibus heading south to our first site of the day – a beachside area at Pinedo that reliably provides Mediterranean Skippers. These unassuming skippers may be subtle, but they're always popular, with large eyes and bags of character. What they may have lacked in aesthetic appeal was more than made up for my a number of drop-dead-gorgeous day flying moths – several Provence Burnets were on the wing, with their incredible lysergic coloured wings warning predators to leave them well alone. We ignored the warning, and feasted our cameras on them!

A stop nearby for lunch at a friendly restaurant led to a pleasant chance to swap travel stories over bocadillos sat outside on a quiet roadside pavement, and then we hit the road again for a short drive to the shores of Pujol Lake, where the birds took over from the insects for a while. A good variety of wetland species were accounted for, with Audouin's and Slender-billed Gulls keeping the larophiles happy, and the always popular Collared Pratincole defying all definitions of what makes a wader.

From here we moved closer to our hotel, stopping en route at some paddyfields outside Silla. The focus here was meant to be on one butterfly in





particular, African Grass Blue but, inevitably, we got a little distracted before we found the first of several of those... a showy roadside Iberian Grey Shrike was a lifer for some, while the first of the week's Bee-eaters were also noted... and then, no sooner had we parked the minibus, than keen eyes noticed a Violet Dropwing perched obligingly over a ditch beside the road. The first of many Broad Scarlets and Red-veined Darters were also perched alongside, and set the tone for the next hour or so – we were treated to a good variety of dragon- and damselflies of half a dozen species.

Our search for African Grass Blues was a fairly short one before the first insect was seen – a search through a good many Lang's Short-tailed Blues that abounded in the low vegetation along the edges of a track leading out deep into the paddyfields. Our patience was rewarded with first one, and then several more African Grass Blues, some in fine fresh condition and at least one female seen ovipositing.

The afternoon had been a great success, and after another short drive we arrived at Casa Babel, our comfortable hotel and base for the coming week. The food here is so good it deserves a report all of its own!

Day 2 - 2nd September

With some heavy rain due near to our hotel today, we shifted the week's itinerary around to make

the most of fine weather elsewhere. It pays to be flexible, and especially when the alternative to the planned Two-tailed Pasha this morning is as special as a colony of Desert Orange Tips! We found half a dozen insects on the wing, varying from very worn to pristine condition, staying close to a patch of their food plant that spilled over a clifftop down towards crashing waves on rocks below.

With them under our belt we headed south towards salt pans near Alicante, making several stops before lunch beside, yes, more salt pans! These provided excellent habitat for a variety of gulls, most notably

Slender-billed and Mediterranean; terns, including Whiskered; and waders - passage Sanderling

feeding in the same areas as roosting Collared Pratincoles, while Avocets and Black-winged Stilts patrolled the briny water. Stars of the show, of course, were the incongruous forms of many hundreds of Greater Flamingos.

After lunch we headed for an inland wetland, swapping saline water for freshwater and, with it, the chance of more wildfowl and dragonflies. Our plan paid off with great views of two of Europe's rarest duck species, White-headed and Marbled, sharing a pool with Little and Black-necked Grebes, fringed with trees holding roosting Little and Cattle Egrets,

and reedbeds filled with hundreds of roosting Sand Martins, already heading south for the coming winter.

Another pool on the reserve provided great photographic opportunities for dragonflies, with mating Lesser Emperors particularly popular outside the hide windows, and Squacco Herons and Western Swamphens feeding unobtrusively at the pool margins. The drive home in the late afternoon was into a cauldron of thunderstorms and torrential rain back at the hotel, amply reinforcing that we'd made the right decision to juggle the itinerary.



Day 3 - September 3rd

We got firmly back into the insect-hunting saddle this morning when, with the day dawning bright and sunny, our Two-tailed Pasha mission was back on. Pau took us to a track that led up through



pine forests to a mountainside covered with abandoned agricultural terraces, the occasional olive tree poking through the surrounding colonising vegetation showing how once these terraces had been carefully managed. Now, with nature reclaiming them, the walls are starting to slump here and there. Pau had staked out a mature fig tree where he was sure we would find the 'foxy emperor', so we headed uphill towards that. Adrian, forging ahead of the group, saw a Two-tailed Pasha in flight overhead, but it wasn't until we reached the famous fig tree that all of the group were treated to prolonged views of at least two insects feeding hungrily from over-ripe, split figs on the tree, or roosting nearby in the branches. Every now and again one or both



would take flight - Julian was the first to note how like a bat they appeared when on the wing, so large and dark were they, and powerful in flight.

The walk back downhill was a happy one, all of us as sated with Two-tailed Pashas as they were with fruit. We found a mating pair of Wood Whites, a Tree Grayling, and a succession of tawny Speckled Woods and Wall Browns, but none could hold a candle to the king and queen of the terraces.

A short drive took us to a small, pretty village and our site for the next couple of hours, including lunch - a damp seep where a clear, freshwater spring trickled into a stream. The seep crossed a concrete apron that abounded with dragonflies – lots of dramatic Emperors, but also a couple of keenly anticipated Orange-winged Dropwings that were challenging to approach, to say the least.

Above the stream, perched on bare

branches, we also found Desert Darter

and Copper Demoiselle while on the trackside nearby there were more African Grass Blues to distract us, and overhead Red-rumped Swallows were hawking insects. We ate our picnic lunch in the shade of the canopy of an old stone laundry pool, with Jon, Edward and Chris opting to shed boots and socks and dangle their feet in the clear, achingly cold, refreshing water.

Wood Whites © Jon Dunn

After lunch, we visited a nearby micro-reserve set up by Pau, in cooperation with the local council,

planted with a number of Strawberry Trees to attract Two-tailed Pashas. While the reserve is in its infancy, it's already home to some insects – notably more approachable Orange-winged Dropwings and, to Adrian's delight, several Striped Graylings, a butterfly he particularly wanted to see this week. Birds seen here included Rock Bunting and a covey of startled Red-legged Partridges.



Day 4 - September 4th

Today was another expeditionary day, heading further afield towards Alicante. We started deep in the foothills that fringe the coast, in a rocky amphitheatre of cliffs and bluffs that wouldn't have

looked out of place in a Western. We'd no sooner arrived than we bumped into a couple of newly emerged Orange-winged Dropwings and, shortly after that, an immaculate Swallowtail - which would prove to be the only of its kind we saw during the week.

At the end of the road, where tarmac ended and turned into a steep, stony track that meandered up towards the cliffs, we could hear Black Wheatears singing somewhere nearby, but were distracted by a number of Subalpine Warblers passing through the area, moving from bush to bush and feeding actively. It took a short while before Pau found our first Black Wheatear, sitting on top of a distant



boulder. We moved closer for better views of it and another individual flycatching at the base of the cliffs, and Edward's keen eyes picked out a smart male Blue Rock Thrush. That was further gilded by an Iberian Grey Shrike - while occasional Thekla Larks dropped in around us. This was good birding!



We headed off for the coast, but not before Adrian had chased another Striped Grayling... At the large Fondo reserve, we had an early lunch in the shaded seating area, distracted by a family of Red-knobbed Coots feeding in the small pool beside us, with Squacco Herons and Glossy Ibises vying for our attention. Walking out over the reserve's boardwalks we found closer Red-knobbed Coots, and got good views of Lesser Emperors, including a copulating pair. The paths to the hides were where we confidently expected to find Plain Tigers but, to our horror, we found the tracksides and ditches had all been flailed, with vegetation cut down to ground level. This mismanagement of the reserve was

shocking to see, and we left empty-handed – the group would need to try elsewhere for Plain Tigers...

Pau took us to another site on the far side of the reserve, but despite walking a long track fringed with the butterfly's food-plant, we didn't see any insects apart from a couple more Mediterranean Skippers. Some new waders at a small hide, including Curlew Sandpiper, were scant consolation. The long walk back to the minibus was a little despondent – were we going to dip Plain Tiger after

all?

Happily for all concerned, a final stop at another roadside track that skirted the reserve delivered, spectacularly, the goods – a mating pair of fresh Plain Tigers that posed obligingly for us and a couple of interested passing cyclists who stopped to see what all the fuss was about. To say we were ecstatic would be something of an understatement – these had been hard earned on a hot, humid day in the field. As we walked back to the minibus another insect was seen flying around – this, on its own, would have been a result, but were eclipsed totally by the cooperative pair we'd just been watching. A small celebration was in order, so we stopped

small celebration was in order, so we stopped for a welcome ice cream on the journey back to the hotel.



Day 5 - 5th September

We spent the morning down on the Pego Marshes Natural Park, a network of lush agricultural fields and wetland borders that abound with birds and dragonflies. Here we found one of Pau's academic colleagues manning mistnets in a long-running study that's approaching 20 years of data gathering to monitor bird populations in the park. The opportunity to learn about this and to watch



some science in action was fascinating – and for some of the group, there were some lifers in the offing too...

Amongst several commoner warblers ringed, predominantly Reed and Great Reed Warblers, some scarcer species emerged from the nets – a gorgeous, chocolatey brown Moustached Warbler, and a Savi's Warbler too. Other highlights included a young male Bluethroat and, to everyone's delight, a Kingfisher as well.

We left the ringer to his hard work and set off to explore the area on foot. Irrigation ditches were heaving with Little Egrets, Glossy Ibis and occasional Squacco Herons, while dragonflies were warming up and taking to the wing. Our steps were dogged, meanwhile, by the curious Northern Banded Groundlings, dragonflies that hover like little helicopters in the presence of grazing animals hoping for disturbed prey. In the absence of any livestock, they made do with us...

Lunch was taken a short distance from here at a riverside picnic site, with Red-rumped Swallows gathering overhead. The river itself was invitingly deep and cool, but we resisted the urge for a dip – and instead found Emperors, Lesser Emperors, and Violet Dropwings

patrolling the riverbanks.





A drive inland followed lunch, heading up into the hills around Vall de Gallinera. Here, at another riverside site, we indulged ourselves in a suite of new dragonflies – Small Red Damselfly, Blue-eyed Damselfly, Keeled Skimmer and the ghostly, ethereal forms of dainty White-legged Damselflies. The walk back to the minibus, sated with new species, was enlivened a little further with a flyover flock of Crossbills – the icing on the cake.

Day 6 - 6th September

Today had the feel of an expedition as we headed deeper inland, swapping the hills of the coastal fringe for the immense horizons of the region's extensive agricultural flatlands, the steppes of Albacete, home to a suite of specialist birds we wouldn't see elsewhere, and chances for second helpings of some species we'd already seen. Our first stop yielded over a dozen distant, wary Great Bustards and, closer by, Thekla and Short-toed Larks, another Iberian Grey Shrike, and a single Stone Curlew, sadly with a damaged wing. Flocks of Spotless Starlings were murmurating

over the fields as we moved on – unable to find a Lesser Kestrel, we made do with numerous Common Kestrels, Common Buzzards, and occasional Marsh Harriers too.

A brief roadside stop brought us a flock of Rock Sparrows on the overhead wires and then, following dry earth tracks through the fields, we got close views of several Hoopoes, and a briefly confiding Whinchat. We were a little cautious about these tracks as there had been heavy rain in the area in the preceding days, and some tracks definitely looked like they could be impassably muddy for all but a tractor. Discretion being the better part of valour, we headed back to tarred roads and, on our way to



our lunch stop, checked a handful of roadside lagoons – waders were definitely on the move, and we came across Greenshanks, Ruff and Curlew Sandpipers.

Lunch was taken beside a sizeable lake - a waterbody carpeted with more Common Coots than any of us had ever seen before, but amongst them some more refined species – more Whiteheaded Ducks being particularly welcome, but also Black-necked Grebes and a handful of Gadwall. Lunch was interrupted by Jon announcing a Purple Heron flying low across the water – what would prove to be the only one of these elegant herons we'd see this week.

After lunch, our insect-hunting instincts kicked back in, and we quartered the lake's margin and the dry roadside vegetation to see what we could find. New butterflies were soon forthcoming, with Southern Gatekeeper and Adonis Blue both logged; while Common Blue Damselfly and Southern Emerald Damselfly were also new for our burgeoning dragonfly list.

Some nearby saltpans failed to yield much new apart from a powerfully sulphurous, rotten egg aroma from the water, though good views of the many Greater Flamingos that breed at this inland site, and Glossy Ibises too, were always a joy for us. It felt like time for a coffee in a local street café but, this being Greenwings, we never stopped looking for new butterflies – though the Geranium Bronze that buzzed our table and chairs had found us, rather than the other way around!

Day 7 - 7th September - departure day

Our flights were all in the late afternoon from Valencia airport, meaning we could make the most of the morning and the early afternoon for visiting a few more sites as we worked our way north towards the city. We returned to the wetlands that had been so kind to us in previous days, albeit visiting new sites in them.



The paddyfields of Albufera were where we started the morning, our arrival coinciding with butterflies and dragonflies beginning to become active in the new day. African Grass Blues, some in pristine condition, flickered in silver and blue motes around our feet, while Julian found a gorgeous fresh Bath White roosting on dew-soaked grass. A small nearby pool was bursting with herons – our first Little Bitterns, but also Squacco Heron, Night Heron, Cattle and Little Egrets. We were hoping to find Black Percher here, but this was one dragonfly that was destined to elude us – given we had racked up 20 species in total over the course of the week, we could afford to be magnanimous about that one, and chalk it up as an excuse to come

back another time!

The second half of the morning was spent within the private boundaries of the green filter of Tancat de Milia, an extensive area of reedbeds and waterbodies managed to filter and clean water passing

towards the coast. We explored the green filter on foot, walking an extensive network of raised tracks that kept our feet dry and proved to be an excellent vantage point for birding - yet more new species were forthcoming, with Caspian and Whitewinged Terns and Spoonbill both new for the week; and some old favourites were seen afresh, with Western Swamphen, as usual, a purple patch in anyone's birding day. The flowery margins of the tracks were not without interest - by some margin, Redveined Darters were the most numerous dragonflies on offer, while testament to a fresh emergence of Lang's Short-tailed Blues was borne by how many mating pairs we encountered.



It was, perhaps, fitting that one of our final impressions of the wetlands and hills in Valencia should have been of new life in the making, as this trip was the second Greenwings trip to operate smoothly and uneventfully in Spain in these days of learning to live and work around the restrictions and precautions of an ongoing global pandemic. We're all learning to find our feet in this brave new world, and it comes as a considerable relief to tour leaders, guests, and local businesses alike for us to be able to travel once more. Pau and Jon would like to thank our guests for joining us in Valencia, and for making the week such a pleasure with their unfailing good company, fine humour, and sharp eyes. Between us, we found a lot of amazing insects and birds, and can't wait to come back to do it all again.

Species Checklists

Bu	itterflies & Moths		Day 1 Wed 1st Sept	Day 2 Thu 2nd Sept	Day 3 Fri 3rd Sept	Day 4 Sat 4th Sept	Day 5 Sun 5th Sept	Day 6 Mon 6th Sept	Day 7 Tue 7th Sept
1	Swallowtail	Papilio machaon				✓			✓
2	Sage Skipper	Muschampia proto			✓		✓		
3	Marbled Skipper	Carcharodus alceae	✓					✓	
4	Mediterranean Skipper	Gegenes nostrodamus	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Wood White	Leptidea sinapis			✓				
6	Bath White	Pontia daplidice				✓	✓		✓
7	Brimstone	Gonepteryx rhamni			✓				
8	Clouded Yellow	Colias crocea	✓				✓	√	✓
9	Large White	Pieris brassicae			✓			√	✓
10	Small White	Pieris rapae	√					√	✓
11	Plain Tiger	Danaus chrysippus				√			
12	Two-tailed Pasha	Charaxes jasius			✓				
13	Wall Brown	Lasiommata megera			√		✓		
14	Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria			✓		✓		
15	Meadow Brown	Maniola jurtina			✓				
16	Southern Gatekeeper	Pyronia cecilia						√	
17	Striped Grayling	Hipparchia fidia			✓	√			
18	Rock Grayling	Hipparchia hermione			✓				
19	Painted Lady	Vanessa cardui	✓	√					
20	Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta							✓
21	Common Blue	Plyommatus icarus	✓						
22	Lang's Short-tailed Blue	Leptotes pirithous					✓	√	✓
23	Holly Blue	Celastrina argiolus			✓				
24	African Grass Blue	Zizeeria knysna	✓		√				✓
25	Adonis Blue	Lysandra albicans						✓	
26	Desert Orange Tip	Colotis evagore		✓					
27	Geranium Bronze	Cacyreus marshalli						✓	
28	Provence Burnet Moth	Zygaena occitanica	√						





Dra	gonflies & Damselflies	Day 1 Wed 1st Sept	Day 2 Thu 2nd Sept	Day 3 Fri 3rd Sept	Day 4 Sat 4th Sept	Day 5 Sun 5th Sept	Day 6 Mon 6th Sept	Day 7 Tue 7th Sept
1	Copper Demoiselle			√		✓		
2	Blue-tailed Damselfly	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Common Blue Damselfly						✓	
4	Blue-eye Damselfly					✓		
5	Small Red Damselfly					✓		
6	White-legged Damselfly					✓		
7	Southern Emerald Damselfly					✓	✓	
8	Migrant Hawker			√				
9	Emperor	✓		√	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Lesser Emperor		✓		✓	✓		✓
11	Keeled Skimmer					✓		
12	Epaulet Skimmer			✓				
13	Long Skimmer	✓			✓	√		✓
14	Red-veined Darter	✓	√		✓	√	✓	✓
15	Desert Darter			√				
16	Broad Scarlet	✓	✓	√	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Violet Dropwing	✓				✓		✓
18	Orange-winged Dropwing			√	√	✓		
19	Banded Groundling					✓		✓
20	Black-tailed Skimmer		✓					✓

Birds		Day 1 Wed 1st Sept	Day 2 Thu 2nd Sept	Day 3 Fri 3rd Sept	Day 4 Sat 4th Sept	Day 5 Sun 5th Sept	Day 6 Mon 6th Sept	Day 7 Tue 7th Sept
1	Shelduck				✓		✓	
2	Mallard	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	√
3	Gadwall		✓				✓	
4	Shoveler		✓				✓	✓
5	Marbled duck		✓					
6	Pochard		✓		✓		✓	
7	Red-crested pochard		✓		✓			
8	White-headed duck		✓		✓		✓	
9	Red-legged partridge			✓	✓		✓	
10	Little grebe	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
11	Great crested grebe	✓	✓		✓			
12	Black-necked grebe	✓	✓				✓	
13	Cormorant							✓
14	Little bittern							✓
15	Night heron							✓
16	Squacco heron	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
17	Cattle egret	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
18	Little egret	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
19	Great white egret				✓			√

20	Grey heron	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Purple heron						✓	
22	Glossy ibis	✓	✓		✓	√	√	✓
23	Greater flamingo		✓		✓		√	✓
24	Short-toed eagle					√		
25	Osprey					√		
26	Marsh harrier		✓		✓		√	✓
27	Montagu's Harrier						√	
28	Common Buzzard						√	
29	Common kestrel	✓	✓	✓			√	✓
30	Sparrowhawk					√		
31	Water rail							✓
32	Moorhen	✓	✓		√		✓	✓
33	Coot		✓		✓		✓	✓
34	Red-knobbed Coot				✓			
35	Purple swamp-hen		✓		✓			✓
36	Great Bustard						✓	
37	Oystercatcher	✓						
38	Black-winged stilt	✓	✓		✓			✓
39	Avocet		✓		✓			✓
40	Stone curlew						√	
41	Collared Pratincole	✓	✓					
42	Little ringed plover				√			
43	Ringed plover	✓	✓		√			✓
44	Kentish Plover	✓	✓				✓	
45	Sanderling		✓					
46	Lapwing				✓		√	
47	Little stint							✓
48	Dunlin	✓						
49	Curlew sandpiper				√			
50	Green sandpiper	✓			√	✓		✓
51	Wood sandpiper	✓						
52	Common sandpiper							✓
53	Redshank				✓			
54	Greenshank	✓	✓					✓
55	Black-tailed godwit		✓		✓			
56	Snipe	✓						✓
57	Ruff	✓						
58	Black-headed gull				✓			✓
59	Yellow-legged gull	✓	✓				✓	
60	Lesser black-backed gull		✓					✓
61	Mediterranean gull		✓					
62	Audouin's gull	✓						
63	Slender-billed gull	✓	✓		√			
						l		L

64	Whiskered tern	✓	✓				√	√
	Common tern	√	→					
	Sadwich tern	√	√					
	Black tern		√					\vdash
68	Little tern	✓	√					√
69	Feral pigeon				√		√	
70	Wood pigeon	✓		√	√		√	√
71	Rock pigeon	✓					√	
72	Turtle dove							✓
73	Collared dove	✓		✓	√	✓	✓	
74	Swift						✓	
75	Pallid swift		✓					
76	Little owl				✓			
77	Kingfisher		✓			✓		✓
78	Bee-eater	✓				✓		
79	Ноорое		✓	✓		✓	✓	
80	Crested lark	✓					✓	
81	Thekla lark				√		✓	
82	Short-toed lark						√	
83	Sand martin	✓	✓					✓
84	Crag martin				✓			
85	Barn swallow	✓	✓	✓	√	√		✓
86	Red-rumped swallow			✓		√		
87	House martin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Yellow wagtail	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
89	White wagtail					✓	✓	
90	Wren			✓				
91	Robin			✓				
92	Bluethroat					✓		✓
93	Whinchat						✓	
94	Northern wheatear						✓	
95	Black wheatear				√			
96	Blue rock thrush				√			
97	Blackbird		✓	✓	√			
$\overline{}$	Blackcap			✓				
	Sardinian warbler	✓		✓	✓	✓		
$\overline{}$	Western subalpine warbler				✓	✓		
	Moustached warbler					✓		
	Fan-tailed warbler	✓			✓	✓		✓
103	Savi's warbler					✓		
104	Cetti's warbler					✓		✓
	Reed warbler					✓		✓
	Great reed warbler					✓		✓
107	Willow warbler			✓				

108	Firecrest			✓				
109	Spotted flycatcher		✓		✓	✓	✓	
110	Great tit		✓			✓	✓	
111	Blue tit			✓				
112	Long-tailed tit			✓				
113	Short-toed treecreeper			✓				
114	Iberian grey shrike	✓		✓	✓		✓	
115	Magpie	√			√	√	✓	√
116	Jay			✓				
117	Raven			✓	✓		✓	
118	Spotless starling	✓					✓	✓
119	House sparrow	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
120	Tree sparrow					√		
121	Rock sparrow						✓	
122	Chaffinch			✓				
123	Greenfinch					√		
124	Serin	√		✓				
125	Goldfinch				√	√	✓	
126	Linnet						✓	
127	Crossbill					✓		
128	Rock bunting			✓				
129	Corn bunting						✓	
130	Common waxbill					✓		✓
131	White-winged tern				✓			✓
132	Caspian tern							✓
133	Spoonbill							✓







































































