

# Spain's Cantabrian Mountains - Realm of the Bear

Naturetrek Tour Report

11 - 18 June 2008



Lizard Orchid



Provence Orchid



Military Orchid



Somiedo-Caunedo Valley

Report and images compiled by Byron Palacios



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## Day 1

Wednesday 11th June

### London to Pola de Somiedo

The group arrived at Asturias airport in the early afternoon full of enthusiasm for starting the tour. After a quick snack and 'service stop' at the airport, we got in our van and then made our way south and up into the Cantabrian Mountains. The scenery became increasingly impressive as we progressed. We made a brief stop in the lovely village of Tameza which produced our first views of Griffon Vultures, Girt Bunting, Yellowhammer, Serin and Crag Martins. We finally arrived at our comfortable hotel in Pola in the heart of the Somiedo National Park in good time to settle in before enjoying a delicious first dinner together.

## Day 2

Thursday 12th June

### Pola de Somiedo, El Llamardal & Puerto Somiedo

After a relaxing breakfast on a beautiful sunny morning in the village, the small streets and river introduced us to a range of common local birds including Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Black Redstart and Serin. After breakfast we drove the short distance up to El Llamardal and then spent the bulk of the day walking to Braña de Mumian and back. The walk took us first through mixed woodland and then out onto high meadows with patches of scrub and the picturesque seasonal grazing settlement of El Mumian itself (from the distance). The scenery was superb and the flowers spectacular. Chamois posed on the crags, Iberian Rock and Viviparous Lizards scuttled over the boulders and butterflies such as Moroccan Orange Tip, Green Hairstreak and Wall Brown flew over the grassland. Bird highlights included great views of Red-backed Shrike, Water and Meadow Pipits, Garden Warbler, Rock Bunting, Black Kite, Griffon Vultures, Red-billed Chough, Kestrel and a Short-toed Eagle that passed close overhead and then hovered in classic style over a nearby hilltop.

Once we were back in the van, we continued driving south and stopped in a lush picnic area at 1,400 metres above sea level in Puerto Somiedo. After a classy picnic lunch during which we had amazingly close views of a male Montagu's Harrier, we set out to enjoy the rest of the area looking for gorgeous flowers and beautiful birds, including Ortolan Bunting and Yellow Wagtail, Rock Bunting, Buzzard, Grey and White Wagtails, White Stork and Northern Wheatear. After exploring the other side of the hill, we drove back to the hotel in Pola for a little break. After this, we drove three miles out of Pola to our first Brown Bear spot to try to see some, but to no avail. We decided to drive back and enjoy our succulent dinner.

## Day 3

Friday 13th June

### Aguino, Perlunes & Senda de Castro.

It was another beautiful sunny day and we took a scenic drive up to Aguino, peppered with stops for views of flowers, Red Deer and a delightful Red Fox. This was followed by a walk up and over the high tops to the picturesque views of the Valley of Rio Somiedo. We explored the first stop where a viewpoint has been made and had lovely views of at least 20 Griffon Vultures, two pairs of Egyptian Vultures, Short-toed Eagle, a Firecrest working on its nest, Chiffchaff and others. We continued towards the hidden village of Perlunes where we enjoyed a productive walk around the village, which was full of wildlife. Some Roe Deer, Chamois and Red Deer were concentrated on the meadows in good numbers. We also had good views of Red-backed Shrike, Black Redstart, Dipper, Blackcap, Coal Tit and more.

Around lunchtime, we found a pleasant picnic area by the main road near Castro. There was a good view of the mountains, so we decided to have our picnic lunch there. In the afternoon we started our walk on senda the Castro trail. Lots of Firecrest and Bonelli's Warblers were around. Iberian Chiffchaff, Hobby, Peregrine Falcon and two Golden Eagles were the highlights on that day. Lots of flowers and plants were found along this trail, including the very rare and endemic flower *Centaureum somiedensis*. We also saw many beautiful orchids such as Lizard, Military, Fly, Bee and Burnt-tip.

## Day 4

Saturday 14th June

### La Peral & Valle De Salencia

Today it was another beautiful sunny morning, to start with. After breakfast we drove south from Pola to the small village of La Peral. We walked the trail near Villar de Vildas and back again through some fine woodland with dramatic views down to the whole valley far below. Lots of Water and Meadow Pipits were seen, also Skylarks, Stonechat, Blue Rock Thrush, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Red-billed Chough and many Buzzards and Kestrels. We heard lots of Bonelli's Warblers, Iberian Chiffchaffs and Firecrests singing from deep within the dense vegetation. Flowers, of course, were as good as ever and included a lovely White Helleborine in full bloom. We also had the best views ever of one Chamois walking and running very close to us for two minutes – great!

We found another good place for our picnic lunch then after lunch we drove towards Salencia valley. A few stops were made in order to see some old brañas. Once we arrived at the top, we took the trail towards the beautiful lakes linked to La Farrapona (the highest altitudinal point of this trip – 1,680 metres above sealevel). We walked on the main trail where we had good views of Alpine Chough, Blue Rock Thrush, Crag Martin, and fantastic views of a pair of Golden Eagles. Sand, Green and Viviparous Lizards were seen along the trail too.

Soon after we were watching White Storks, Whinchats, Northern Wheatears, Spotless Starlings and Corn Buntings, all of which appeared to be absent from the high valleys of Somiedo. At one point we stopped to scan the surrounding slopes and were rewarded by good views of two. Back at the hotel, most of us were keen for a cool drink and ready to enjoy another delicious local supper.

## Day 5

Sunday 15th June

### Valle del Lago & Coto de Buenamadre.

As we started out on this grey day, the weather was very unsettled with some patches of sun and it was quite chilly. Today would not prove to be as good as the previous day but it was still good. We drove above Pola de Somiedo, to the head of the Valle del Lago, the third largest valley in the area. A walk on a slightly muddy trail introduced us to a mixed habitat good for seeing species such as Crested Lark, Corn Buntings and Hoopoe. Raptors here were outstanding and included Short-toed Eagles, Red and Black Kites, Montagu's Harrier. By lunch time, the weather didn't look that nice and sunny. Although the rain was a threat we managed to set up our picnic lunch near the village of Valle del Lago and enjoyed it by the Valle river. We also managed to get some hot drinks from the local camp site shop.

We continued walking down the road towards Coto de Buenamadre. We took the trail from there down towards Pola de Somiedo. There were a great many colourful flowers and lots of species of plants were seen, including a wide range of orchid species such as Early Marsh, Robust Marsh, Dark Red Helleborine, a white variety of Early Purple and Lesser Butterfly Orchid.

## Day 6

Monday 16th June

### Pola de Somiedo, Llamardal & Salencia.

After an early coffee and tea we went to an area where the last Brown Bears were seen two weeks ago by Gloria. During a cold morning's walk in the beautiful Valle de Lago we found a lovely stand of Burnt-tip Orchids and enjoyed good views of Roe Deer, Chamois and Red Deer. Some farmland birds were actively feeding youngsters, and a couple of singing Garden Warblers, several Rock Buntings plus a quartet of Red-billed Choughs were swooping playfully around a rock face. We came back to our hotel for a proper breakfast and continued our day visiting Llamardal and Salencia Valley. A solitary Little Owl was sitting on a rock waiting for the imminent rain. In the afternoon we drove back to Pola de Somiedo in order to spend the time visiting the National Park's visitor centre as the rain never stopped on this particular day. One full day of rain was not a big issue for all of us after enjoying the previous five days of full sunshine!

## Day 7

Tuesday 17th June

### Pola de Somiedo, Caunedo & Puerto Somiedo

The weather was very kind and offered us another lovely clear sunny morning once again. In the early morning we went up to the high viewpoint above the dramatically positioned village of Caunedo in the hope of seeing a bear. Sadly our luck was out, but an hour or so up there did give us some good views of Chamois, Red and Roe Deer grazing on the meadows, not far from the local 'ganado asturiano' (local breed of cattle from the region). We went back to our hotel for a local-style breakfast then continued towards the upper part of Valle de Lago. We found a pair of Woodlarks, had good views of Willow Tits, Iberian Chiffchaff and Golden Eagle. In the afternoon Dippers, Iberian Green Woodpecker and a perched Montagu's Harrier were the main highlights. Many orchids such as Lizard, Militar, Fly and Mirror were beautifully in flower for us.

We came back to our hotel ready to enjoy our last 'Asturian' supper of the trip all together!

## Day 8

Wednesday 18th June

### Pola de Somiedo to Asturias Airport to London

After a leisurely morning in Pola de Somiedo we had breakfast then some of us went to the shops to get some souvenirs and the local La Peral blue cheese, which was very popular and eaten heartily as part of every single picnic lunch. With bags and suitcases packed and loaded on our van's boot, we left Pola and made our way back down towards the coast. We stopped en route for a break and to stretch a bit. We saw Bee Orchids along the road as well as Griffon Vultures, Red Kites, Swifts and Crag Martins flying around and made it to the airport in good time.

Although we were all very happy and satisfied after our week enjoying the beautiful landscapes and wildlife of Somiedo National Park, a feeling of sadness invaded our hearts for a moment because the time to leave this wonderful area of Spain had come. Everything went smoothly and we arrived back in the UK safely and on time a few hours later.

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## Species lists

### Birds

Common name	Scientific name	June							
		11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>								
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>					1			
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>					4			
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		1		1		1		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		2		2			3	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			5		3		2	
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>								
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>								
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>								
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>								
Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>								
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	13	20	20	15	15	2	12	12
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	3	3	2	4	3		4	
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		1		3	3		1	
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>							1	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	1				5		1	
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	2	2	1	3	4		3	
Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2							
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	2						2	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	5	4	6	4		8	3
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>								
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	4	1	2	3	1		3	
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	1		3				1	
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1			1	1			
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1	1					
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		2	4	3	4		2	
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>								
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				3				
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>								
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>								
Avocet	<i>Avosetta recurvirostra</i>								
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>								
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>								
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>								
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>								
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>								
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>								
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>								
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>								
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	3						2	
Herring Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>							2	
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>								
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>								
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>								
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	25	32	43	23	45	23	34	13
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	5	12	13	12	12	12	14	12

Common name	Scientific name	June							
		11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		2		1			1	
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>								
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				1				
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>								
European Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	25	25	20	15	50	10	10	10
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		2	2		1			
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>								
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			1				1	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1			2		1	
Middle S. Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos medius</i>								
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		2	2	3	1	1	2	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		2			1		1	
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		2					2	
Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachytactyla</i>								
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		2						
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>								
Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	10	2	10	5	12	5	10	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	25	15	14	20	25	12	15	15
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	10	23	10	10	14	2	10	14
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			2					
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>		2	3	5		3		
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		2	2				2	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>				1			2	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	7	5	5	8	5	3	5	2
Spanish (Yellow) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>					8			
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	2	4	5	3	3	2	2
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	2	8	5	5	1	3	5	3
Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		1	2	3		2	3	1
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		3	25	5	5	2	4	
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1	2	4	5	15	10	8	4
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		1						
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	1	3	5	8	15	6	5	1
Common Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		2			1		2	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				1				
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>		1	1	3	1	2	4	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		3	1	2	1	2		
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	6	10	5	5	5	6	5	1
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		6	4	3	5	6	2	1
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	2	15	15	10	6	10	10	3
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>							1	
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>								
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		1					1	
Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>				2				
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	1	4	1	4	1	1	3	2
Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>		3	1	1			2	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	2	2	4	3	5	5	5	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		2		2		1	2	
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>		2	4	2	4	2	3	1
Crested Tit	<i>Parus cristatus</i>		1					1	

Common name	Scientific name	June							
		11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>					1			
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		3					2	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>								
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		3		2			2	
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>					1			
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	8	6	5	2	5	4	5	2
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		2	5	4	2	4	8	2
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			2		3	2		
Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax Pyrrhonorax</i>		12	16	12	8	10	16	
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax graculus</i>			2	5				
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	10	4	2	5	10	5	5	5
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	12	4	5	5	4	5	5	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	1							3
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	5	16	15	15	10	5	12	5
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>								
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>								
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		7	5	12	6	5	5	3
Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		3	10	10	12	1	4	5
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	4	12	7	3	15	4	4	4
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		2	3	4	4	2		
Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	3	3	5	8	2	8	8	
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>					1			
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		2	5	2	4	4		
Reed Bunting	<i>Eberiza schoeniclus</i>								
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		4	5	7		10	3	
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>		2					1	

## Mammals

Red Fox, Red Deer, Roe Deer, Chamois and Red Squirrel.

## Reptiles

Viviparous Lizard, Iberian Rock Lizard, Green Lizard, Sand Lizard.

## Butterflies

Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Moroccan Orange Tip, Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Cleopatra, Wood White, Green Hairstreak, Purple-shot Copper, Holly Blue, Short-tailed Blue, Little Blue, Black-eyed Blue, Turquoise Blue, Adonis Blue, Common Blue, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock Butterfly, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary, Spotted Fritillary, Provencal Fritillary, Chapman's Ringlet, Small Heath, Pearly Heath, Spanish Heath, Speckle Wood, Large Wall Brown, Wall Brown, Grizzle Skipper and Red Underwing Skipper.