

Field notes for Andalusia trip

Introduction

The trip took place on the following dates:

25-May to 1-June - DGC and CEC

1-June to 9-June - DGC,PM,BPP

25-May

Arrived in Gibraltar after a rather too early flight. Found car; cheap but queued for ages then on to the Hotel Caleta right on the edge of the rock almost as far as the road will go. Very pleasant and very friendly with splendid lunch on the terrace comprising simple tapas and coke. The hotel is in the process of being updated as evidenced by new PVC windows and rather older rotting wooden varieties. Dinner in the Nuno was fine albeit sparsely inhabited.

26-May

Sun before seven....We woke to a beautiful clear sunny sky and by 10:00 it was pissing down. We found Europa Point but too cold to stop. Our aim was Cape Trafalgar but weather and lunch prevented. We found a fine bar in Barbate and lunched well. The marismas in Barbate look good and have reasonable access. The sea club rush areas look encouraging.

The weather worsened throughout the day; the wife suggested we go inland, we did, it got worse. However we are in the house freezing cold but no probs.

27-May

Getting used to Gaucin; walked up the hacho and then to the castle. Not bad bearing in mind I slept most of the day!! Worth noting that eating in Gaucin on Sunday and Monday is not easy but at least the Restaurant La Fuente is open all week. Birds good from the terrace probably making up for yesterday's crap weather.

28-May

First Odo day and what a difference between two rivers. In the morning we visited El Colmenar and the Rio Guadiaro. The desvio has now been removed as the bridge has been repaired. The river looks fine but apart from a few *C. haemorrhoidalis* there was nothing flying. The water was freezing, no exuviae; looks like we are far too early.

We lunched in a fine little tapas bar in Estacion Gaucin which cost the princely sum of 7 euros inc cokes!!

After this we went down to the Guadiaro by the bridge where it was equally devoid of life.

Depressed we went to the Rio Genal at Gaucin (the bridge); what a difference!! The place was seething with odos and the water was so warm even the wife sat with her feet in the stream without dying of the cold. The problem that I now see with the Genal is that it is a shallow stony river. Even the deeper stretches are rocky and probably unsuitable for Macromia. The visitors from previous years must have been just that; I cannot see how it could have bred. I looked for exuviae but with no success. Interesting stuff here. I photoed a most odd libellulid that looks like it must be *O. chrysostigma* but is it. I also saw but it disappeared, what looked like *Urothemis edwardsi*. Must return!!

We then drove along the Crestallina and saw some fine vultures through the scope.

The evening was once again a search for food. We landed up at the Casita; hardly a restaurant but was soon filled with starving brits wandering the streets of Gaucin in the forlorn hunt for food. However the burger was nice and the humous very garlicy. Cheap too.

29-May

Our first thoughts came to nothing; we drove along the Ruta de Jimena, a track just passed the Crestallina. Promising initially but it grinds to a halt with no prospect of the river so we drove on to Rio Manilva and the Roman baths. The river smells like sewage but the sulphurous effusions that whiten the water are used for bathing and much sought after even today. The most interesting odo was *Trithemis kirbyi*. An African species that has at last arrived in

Europe. I saw at least three males in this area. Most of the material was fully adult and my original thoughts of being too early appear wrong.

The wife appeared covered in mud; fell over visiting a restaurant; it opens on 1-June.

On the motorway and off at Guadiaro which is a new development eponymously situated on the river adjacent Sotogrande. The river is fairly inaccessible and the road leads off to the Hozgarganta here. The river is difficult of access, very agricultural and very overgrown; it only gets good at Jimena which was our destination

The river is so much fuller than two years ago; the drought fears have gone and the river is back in pristine condition. Things don't change though; the wind is still fierce.

Despite the wind, the bugs are about and the zygops are more prominent than I have ever seen them. The Canuelo pool is still brilliant and well worth a revisit.

30-May

An upper Guadiaro day; and what a difference. The barometer is the wife's feet. In the Hozgarganta and in the Genal she can paddle all day, in the Guadiaro no chance. The Odo fauna reflects this position which is clear from the records. We visited three main sites: Cortes, Libar and Benajoan, all were similarly poor. Searching in deep stretches particularly at Cortes for exuviae proved quite fruitless apart from a few gomphus sp. (*G. simillimus*) And I gomphus seen (fully mature). The only species in any numbers was *I. graellsii*.

As to the upper Benajoan area this is a revelation with Dartford Warbler, Choughs, Griffons etc. Still no decent ponds though.

31-May

Today was the Upper Genal day where we recorded *M. splendens* on two sites with exuviae. The first site was an obvious deep pool with overhanging rock. I knew it would be there and it was. I had to strip; the water was at least 5'0" deep and bloody cold. The four exuviae were all situated at about 300 mm from the water and all

in the preferred overhanging posture. This site was muddy but the other on the small tributary was quite unlike any *Macromia* river as it was rocky with little mud simply some remnant algae. The key is depth and appears to be the only essential criteria as it will not dry up.

In all other respects these are both rocky upland streams apparently unsuitable for *M.splendens*.

We also visited Peter and Sheila who have recently moved to Guenguacil and are renting properties; fabulous views and Bonelli's Eagle to boot.

The weather this spring has been variable: when it was good in UK (April) it was poor in Spain but hey they needed the rain.

1-Jun

Dropped the wife off at Gib and made my way around the coast to Tarifa. There discovered a half decent river or, I should say, two rivers. The Rio de la Jara and the Rio de la Vega both meet just north of Tarifa and are full of good macrophytes near the junction. I thought perhaps for African species here but no such luck; all very predictable. First Croc (*C. erythraea*) was nice and ovi. *L. viridis* emerging in good numbers. I moved up river to the Rio de la Jara on the new road that goes by the Santuario de Nuestra Senora de la Luz. At the first stop only *O. chrysostigma* was present with a few *I. graellsii*. At the second stop there was nothing at all. I suspect that this river is dry for much of the year. *I graellsii* was the only zygop in any numbers and seems to sit on the *Potamogeton* adopting the *Erythromma* role.

The plancha (plat du jour) at the Venta just north of the turning to the Santuario was tuna and very fine too.

Embalse de Almodovar – The shallow edges, though rather windy were full of *S. fonscolombeii* but abundantly and dominantly with *I graellsii*. This insect is everywhere and in massive numbers. This latter appears far more dominant here than *I. elegans* is at home. The shallow grassy edges should have produced Lestids but nothing seen.

Good raptors up this valley including Egyptian Vulture and probably Bonellis Eagle.

Good eating at the new Venta at Jimena.

2-Jun

Cuevo de Gato

Not really an odo day; up to the Cuevo de Gato and the Hacho for plants and birds which succeeded well with a new lifer for Mt P: a black wheatear. He even bought lunch in Grazelema. This is an interesting area with a wealth of plants in an area surrounding a failed Embalse. The Montejaque dam was built in the 1920s to capture the waters of the Rio Campobuche; it failed completely as the waters run away into the Guadiaro by an underground river.

We drove back the long way via the Rio Tavizna that what quite hidden from the road and apparently therefore unsuitable. I suspect that the records come from the El Bosque feeder where the trout farm is and a fine reastarantt called El Trucha. (I recall we had Dipper there back in the last century). The *M. splendens* records (2 larvae in 1983) doubtless obtained after a fine lunch. Current evidence shows that this is quite possible; *M. splendens* flies up river until available habitat is found; just like people and pubs.

We discussed the prospect of watching for adult *M. splendens* and sitting for long periods. Mr P suggested that Pedro could do it best because he could occupy himself with his vice, smoking. Pedro retorted stating that Mr P could always fart!!

Final visit to the Rio Guadiaro at Estacion Cortes was late: we arrived at around 16:30. Still very little about.

3-Jun

The Rio Genal at Gaucin was first up; 10:00 am arrival with virtually nothing about. I headed for the river and soon picked up exuviae but adults were very hard to find. *I. graellsii* was the only common zygop but even this is small numbers. Gradually matters improved but it was not until noon that *A. imperator* appeared. The weather was perfect and could not be blamed but the adults did not fly. Punters started appearing and by 1:00 pm we were off.

The Roman baths at Manilva are well known; they are also known as the Banos de la Hedionda (the smelly baths) but not known for dragonflies and particularly new European species. *Trithemis kirbyi* soon appeared with *T. annulata*. This is a very small stretch of stream that is deep and slow for only a small stretch of about 200 m; it even has *O. curtisii*. All day we only saw 3 males of *T. kirbyi*. I cannot say that we saw any females.

Lunch was taken at the Venta La Molina where the goat stew was excellent. It is near the ventiladores opposite the Crestallina. Late PM we returned to the river which is still brilliant. We then walked up the adjacent valley which produced large numbers of *A. mixta*; all juvenile and feeding and looking for a safe place to roost. Try as we might we could not convert any to *B. irene* – still a mythical beast for Mr P.

I checked the Rio Manilva for exuviae but found absolutely nothing. We drove further down where the river simply dries out and runs onto the grot of coastal Spain.

As to the evening we stopped at home, eat cheese and sausage and got very drunk!!

4-Jun

The best laid plans!! Weather changes everything; cloud and wind directed a coastal option.

Rio Guadiaro at St Pablo – The river was very strong here and probably gave some clues about why the Guadiaro is so poor for Odonata. This river appears to be very heavily affected by discharges from embalses which add large volumes of cold water at high velocity to the aquatic system only permitting very resistant species to survive. The Guadiaro reminds me of the Mondego in Portugal which is similarly poor.

Research on the web shows that a large water extraction scheme has recently been instigated at Cortes. An embalse on the river ponds up water which pumps extract at a minimum rate of 6 m³ per second and transport via two tuberías to the Rio Majaceite some 10km to the west and some hundreds of m in altitude. The

water will feed into the huge embalses that feed water to Cadiz province.

Rio de la Vega – clearly a great river but the wind – just don't go there

La Janda – the books are right; the camino Agricola Fascinas is accessible and no problem in dry weather with a 4WD. No good with the Ford Focus so we moved and took the track opposite the Venta de Retin (now abandoned). Persevere down here; it takes you to the canal which is an extension of the Rio Almodovar. The area is now drained and heavily farmed with maize and clearly rice. It heaves with mallard but the collared Pratincoles are a total joy. The ditches are deep and cleansed. No odors of note.

There is lots of good stuff on the web about La Janda which was drained in the 1960s (more in full report).

Puerto de Ojen – This name merely summarises what was a very difficult road from Fascinas to Puerto de Valdesparra. It is the C3411 but it is not good; heavily rutted and potholed, it is a hard drive not to be attempted in any weather that is inclement. The area around the Horno de Pan is particularly interesting; it is remote and must contain endless treasures. Botanically it was a true revelation with everything except orchids. A visit to the streams here could be productive.

The plan of eating in Ventas works well.

5-Jun

Hoz (**Rio Hozgarganta**) day. The weather has improved and the wind has dropped. The “spotted shitheap” as Mr P describes the car has its first port of call at km 6 along the road to Jimena. A water tank leaked to the side of the road providing mud adjacent a small bridge; perfect habitat for a family of red rumped swallows who performed for us including youngsters.

This is Hoz day and we arrive to a worse than normal blowing river. We positioned ourselves at the Canuelo pool but alas the wind was even worse here. Very little appeared apart from *T. annulata* and *Cercion* which braves the wind. *O. curtisii* appeared but only briefly. No sign of *M.splendens*. We adjourned for lunch at

the Tasca which provided excellent fare with Gazpacho followed by excellent local fish.

Back in the field at 16:30 we worked up the Hoz to La Saucedá which is the source of the Hoz. At Puente de Las Canillas we stopped by the bridge. The gate opposite the car park is the only access but no problem. Into the river and after an exuviae search (no luck) and whilst wading bullock deep I saw a gomphid; then it (*M. splendens*) appeared: a male in perfect and full adult condition. It flew about 600 mm from the water up stream to the bridge, back around me and down river. PM was sceptical until, yes, it reappeared; flying the same beat but for slightly longer, this time long enough for PM to view. Action continued with a *O. curtisii* and then the gomphid intervened and everything disappeared. The time was 17:15.

Eye colour of *M. splendens* – I was abreast the beast my view was that the eyes were blue green but dark green. PM saw the insect from high above and thought green blue and that the colour on the front of Dijkstra was “not far out”.

That concluded the day's actions but we drove on to la Saucedá which though rather steep and dark may be worth a visit. The Sendero goes right by the river.

Nighjarring proved fruitless – too windy.

Chelm's scrambled egg a triumph, except when it comes to cleaning the pan.

6-Jun

A day of mixed fortunes; started well at the Mirador Genal with a fine male Rock Bunting; life continued in this vein as we progressed from Ronda to El Burgo skirting along the top of the Sierra de las Nieves. The dry treeless country looks perfect for Wheatear: so where are they? Near El Burgo the deep valley of the Rio El Burgo looks encouraging but as you approach the town a very distinct agricultural intensity pervades; serried ranks of olive trees are everywhere dotting the landscape; this is farming country. I looked briefly at a small arroyo which feeds into the Rio El Burgo: no adults but two exuviae (*G. simillimus*). Onwards to the

Rio which becomes the Turon and produced only my second *C. xanthostoma* for Spain. A fast lowland river with eutrophication.

Continuing onwards towards Ardales, the river has the appearance of a typical Eastern stream right for *O. costae* but it is very hard to get at here.

Lunch – very cheap and good in Ardales; Pedro had the lamb shank. Hostal Restaurant is the sign to look for. No frills, no nonsense, good service and cheap.

Lagunas de Campillo – these were a great disappointment. There are four lakes mentioned in the books which are rainfall dependent. Even the largest on the main road was dry as a bone.

Laguna de la Fuente de la Piedra – Looked depressingly dry from a distance but the trick is to go to the Centro Visitantes which has a superb outlook and excellent trails where you can see all the birds.

Home via the Miradors

7-Jun

Mercifully the wind has dropped; but first the car must be cleaned. The problem with the pressure hose is that it comes with sabon (soap) a fact that I had entirely overlooked until for 2 euros we landed up with a ball of soap. All resolved thanks to Mr P reading the instructions properly (in German) and Pedro expertly reusing the machine. Why did we bother; the black top boys were out on the Guenguacil road and nothing was going anywhere until the roller had been through. We progressed gingerly through the new topping spreading tar over Pedro's fine work.

We arrived at the river (**Upper Genal by the Algotocin bridge**) at around noon. At the breeding pool by 12:10 and immediately into *M. splendens* patrolling a large territory. From our standing covering at least 100m of deep slow flowing pool in the river. The flight is slow but constantly moving: about 700 mm above the water unless chasing off other species in which case it would disappear. The beat was regular and leisurely and can be compared to *O. curtisii* which was also flying here. *O. curtisii* flies in a much more nervous manner and generally low. It is obviously

smaller but seen with bins this is not always clear. The main feature for *M. splendens* is the size, metallic thorax and yellow of the abdomen and, of course, the behaviour. Eye colour is important but so variable; in general terms the front cover of Dijkstra is correct but, as Mr P would say, in some conditions the eyes appear black. Importantly, the weather conditions today are perfect with no wind

I walked further up the river and found one additional exuviae and saw at least one male which flew very close to me. I saw no females. The exuviae was found on dead branches about 200 mm above the water. It may have been wind blown.

I returned to the main site and continued to observe *M. splendens* which changed its beat slightly but moving up river but always concentrating on the deepest still section. We left the river at approximately 13:30 and immediately saw yet another male patrolling and adjacent deep pool where the path crosses the river. At least three males on habitat were seen. In summary *M. splendens* behaves rather like *Cordulia aenea* patrolling a regular and sometimes lengthy beat over the deep still habitat stretches where the larvae are to be found.

My opinion is that the main copulation and oviposition activity will take place next week. First two weeks of June is optimum. Once again exuviae of *B. irene* found but no adults. It may be like France where the adult season goes:

- *Gomphus spp* appear first and fly; often difficult to see
- *Oxygastra* and *Macromia* follow
- *Onychgomphus* and *Boyeria* mark the end of the season, when they hit the river in numbers *Macromia* is gone.

Photographing *M. splendens* – My 400 ASA images were inferior to Mr.P's 800 asa versions. The main problem is that *M.splendens* does not hover. It may fly in a slightly more leisurely fashion than *O. curtisii* but its abrupt and continuing movement makes it almost impossible to obtain enlarged images and to focus. Our efforts were as good as could be expected in the circumstances. As Mr P said if I had been on 1600 ASA one image might have been good, the rest would still have been rubbish. Thanks to Mr P we have at least one reasonable image.

After an excellent lunch at the Fuentecilla we progressed to the lower Genal with all the usual suspects. No Hemianax. Most interesting was the *C. haemorrhoidalis* display. The males chose territories in prominent positions low over the river, usually a fast flowing stretch. When a female comes nearby he whirs his wings (like other calops) and lifts his abdomen to display his bright pink bum. The females generally rest up higher and keep out of the males' way until ready.

We saw guys here cutting the *Arundo donax*, presumably for roofing.

Supper on the terrace then nightjarring; packed lunch tomorrow!!!

8-Jun

A day of consolidation; nothing new just revisiting. Starting with Manilva and the roman baths. All previous locations visited at 11:00 am and then at 17:15 and apart from the usual suspects there was no sign of the *T. kirbyi* even though in the early evening I walked the length of the river from rocky dam to the bridge for Los Alamos. Very few exuviae. (*O. curtisii* 2 No.)

The Emabalse de Almodovar came up trumps; Mr P saw many *S. fonscolombeii* albeit that they were all fully adult. Some pairs in copula. *A. parthenope* was common here with a number of males competing for territories. *A. imperator* was also present, *A. parthenope* kept out of his way. The weather was fairly still but quite cloudy and the numbers of *I. graellsii* was quite low compared to the first visit.

Packed lunch with *A. parthenope* was a great success.

The Rio de la Jara proved once again useless whilst the Rio de la Vega at Tarifa had one female *Crocothemis* and 1 male *L. viridis*.

Dinner at the hotel on the terrace was superb with one of the best Gaspachos yet and Liquor de Yervas compliments of the house.

Fin de la vacance.