

Birdingextremadura.com

SPRING TOUR FOR PETE AND JAN FARBRIDGE

By Martin Kelsey

ITINERARY

Day 1: Thursday 11th May

Arrival Madrid Terminal 1: 10.15
Lunch at Arrocampo
Arrive at Casa Rural El Recuerdo by 17.00

Day 2: Friday 12th May

Monfragüe

Day 3: Saturday 13th May

Ricefields near Madrigalejo
Embalse of Sierra Brava
Zorita Plains

Day 4: Sunday 14th May

Santa Marta de Magasca region

Day 5: Monday 15th May

Jaraicejo
Trujillo
Monfragüe

Day 6: Tuesday 16th May

Berzocana
Cabañas del Castillo

Day 7: Wednesday 17th May

Arrocampo
Valdecañas

Day 8: Thursday 18th May

Gredos Mountains
Return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

Day 1

Martin met Pete and Jan at Madrid airport mid-morning on a warm, sunny day. We headed out of Madrid in good time and soon were on the relatively empty A5 motorway heading south-west to Extremadura. We stopped at the reed and great reed mace-fringed reservoir of Arrocampo for a lunch stop and a chance to bird in one of the best wetland habitats in Extremadura. Quickly we had good views **Purple Heron** and **Little Bittern**, whilst **Savi's Warblers** and **Great Reed Warblers** sang from the reeds and a **Gull-billed Tern** passed over. We saw the beautiful structure of a **Penduline Tit's** nest, from which young had recently fledged.

After lunch we proceeded to our destination, arriving at Casa Rural El Recuerdo in time for cold beers in the sitting room. That evening **Red-necked Nightjars** called from the surrounding hills.

Day 2

After breakfast we headed north from Trujillo, through a few kilometres of landscape dominated by granite outcrops and then kilometre after kilometre of dehesa: grazing woodland of evergreen oak as far as the eye could see. The scenery changed only as we crossed rivers, heading east to west: the Tozo, the Almonte and the narrow Arroyo de la Vid. At the latter we waited by the small bridge to look for **White-rumped Swifts**: there was no sign, but we watched a **Sardinian Warbler** bringing food for young, **Red-rumped Swallows** came into their nest under the arches and we very briefly glimpsed a small pale leaf warbler, which was probably a **Bonelli's Warbler** on passage.

After a stop to view the spectacle of the **Griffon Vulture** colony at Peña Falcon, we proceeded to the Portilla del Tietar to see the breeding **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, our stay also being accompanied by a close-by **Nightingale** in full song. Nearby we viewed **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** visiting their nest site.

From there, we slowly returned through the park, checking a belt of pines where we heard **Crested Tit** and stopping at the Tajadilla picnic site for lunch, overlooking cliffs with breeding **Egyptian** and **Griffon Vultures**, with nesting **Black Kite** on trees below. Further on we had excellent views of a pair of **Bonelli's Eagle**, one bird flying in close and below us, before banking upwards, showing its diagnostic wing pattern to textbook perfection. A smart **Black-eared Wheatear** was also found alongside the road.

Day 3

Today we spent most of the time in a very different habitat: the irrigated rice fields near the town of Madrigalejo. We stopped first of all to check the Sierra Brava reservoir and found a rather distant pair of **Black-necked Grebes**. **Gull-billed Terns** and a pair of **Little Tern** frequented two small islands.

Driving then along the small, pot-holed road to Casas del Hito, we had good views of a **Black-winged Kite** close to road in a tree. We then checked an area of recently flooded rice fields, where an Audouin's Gull had been reported the previous day. Despite extensive searching of the area, there was no sign of the bird, but we did see good numbers of **Black-headed Gulls**, an immature **Lesser Black-backed Gull** and at least 40 **Gull-billed Terns**.

Our search for flooded rice fields where gulls could be resting, took us back along the Casas del Hito road. There were several flooded fields, but no gulls, but we did find a small group of **Red-crested Pochard** and **Common Pochard** on the El Hito pool. We then checked the rice fields around Vegas Altas. These were less productive.

We headed to another area of rice fields, along the Ruercus river towards Palazuelo. Over a maize field **Collared Pratincoles** hawked insects. We stopped at the Ruercus river and immediately heard calls of **Penduline Tit**. Patience paid off with good views of a male searching for insects on alder leaves and then feeding a fledgling. **Common Waxbills** and **Red Avadavats** were also present, as well as **Nightingales** and **Great Reed Warblers**. A pair of **Roller** near the village of Palazuelo afforded us excellent views.

We completed the day with a drive across the Zorita Plains. It was dry and hot, but we saw **Montagu's Harrier**, **Calandra** and **Short-toed Lark**. The highlight was a flock of over 50 **Black Kite** drifting slowly overhead.

Day 4

Heading west from Trujillo, we took a small road towards Santa Marta de Magasca, taking us towards a region of open plains. The vegetation on these thin soils had already dried, with the green sward of spring replaced by yellow grass stems. From a vantage point at the top of a track, we found that the yellow vegetation actually made it easier to spot male **Little Bustards**. They tended to stand on slightly higher ground and their black neck with its white chevron contrasted strongly against the straw-coloured background. We found at least six from this location and also picked up a group of male **Great Bustards**. Taking a dirt road across the plains, we found another group of **Great Bustards** and enjoyed excellent views of them as they strode over the gently sloping field. **Calandra** and **Short-toed Larks** sang continuously above us, the **Calandra** with its wonderful mimicry.

We also saw a group of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** fly in to drink at a nearby pool.

From Santa Marta de Magasca, we stopped at the bridge crossing the Tamuja river and were soon rewarded with an adult and juvenile **Bonelli's Eagle** soaring close by. **Short-toed Eagles** were also seen.

We headed north towards Monroy, entering an area of open plains where **Montagu's Harriers** wheeled over the fields. We stopped for lunch at the Almonte river, providing an excellent vantage point to watch birds drifting along the ridges such as **Black Stork**, **Booted Eagle**, **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**. The area provided good opportunities to identify butterflies as well. Near the small car park a **Rock Bunting** sang, whilst **Crag Martins** nested under the bridge.

After lunch we explored the area to the north-west of Monroy, stopping at the Embalse of Talavan where a **Great Reed Warbler** sang near the road. Crossing the Almonte river again, we watched **Alpine Swifts** flying into their nest sites under the arches of the bridge. Finally we stopped north of Cáceres to wait near a pool often used by sandgrouse for drinking, but none showed up during our stay.

Day 5

We headed first thing to the heaths near Jaraicejo where we had excellent views of singing **Spectacled** and **Dartford Warblers**, along with numerous **Thekla Larks** and a few **Calandra Larks**. At the nearby Arroyo de la Vid, **Subalpine Warblers** frequented the scrub, whilst a **Melodious Warbler** sang strongly, **Spanish Sparrows** displayed by their nests, whilst an excellent view was obtained of a **Rock Sparrow** at the old bridge.

We returned to Trujillo to savour the beauty of the old medieval square and to watch the swifts: **Common** and **Pallid**, storm around the buildings and over the narrow streets. The **White Storks'** nests surrounding the square had well developed young and a few **Lesser Kestrels** wheeled overhead.

In the afternoon we returned to Monfragüe and climbed up the steps of the castle. From there we surveyed the ridge heading eastwards, saw **Alpine Swift** and had soon picked up a **White-rumped Swift**, making its appearance regularly near some crags along with hirundines. Four species of swift in one day! We also got a brief view of **Hawfinch**. We completed the day with an evening at the Portilla de Tietar, seeing once again the **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, but pride of place to the adult **Eagle Owl** and the two fledged chicks which delighted us with outstanding views in good light at 9pm.

Day 6

To the east of Trujillo lies the Villuercas mountains and we started our tour of the region with a short walk in the pines and then belts of Pyrenean Oak near Berzocana, heading northwards towards the village of Cabañas del Castillo. The walks were excellent for butterflies and we also found **Bonelli's Warbler**, **Hawfinch** and other species such as **Nuthatch**, **Cirl Bunting** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**. At the village of Cabañas del Castillo, we walked the short distance along the base of the cliffs to appreciate the tremendous scenery eastwards through a gap between the distinctive twin crags. A male **Black Wheatear** was the highlight, but we also got excellent views of **Rock Sparrow**,

Black Redstart, **Blue Rock Thrush** and a pair of **Peregrine**, enabling us to see the considerable size difference between male and female. A **Spotted Flycatcher** was also a good record for the area. Butterflies were not to be outmatched, with good views of a Cardinal amongst others.

Day 7

After breakfast we headed north-east to make a return visit to the Arrocampo wetlands, where we had made a short stop on the way down from Madrid on the first day. We had sightings of two **Penduline Tits**, as well as a **Squacco Heron** in flight, a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and a pair of **Black-winged Kites**, which have taken up residence on a pylon. We also got good views of regular species like **Little Bittern** and **Purple Heron**.

From Arrocampo we drove south to below the dam of Valdecañas to spend the middle part of the day looking at butterflies in some of the quiet lay-bys. The afternoon was concluded with a return visit to the rice fields near Madrigalejo, where the gull numbers had reduced and certainly there was no sign of anything unusual. We did enjoy, however, superb views of **Roller**. We made a brief stop on the way back to Sierra Brava.

Day 8

A late evening flight back to the UK enabled us to take full advantage of the day and we elected to travel back to Madrid via the Gredos Mountains, with a stop in Avila province. We reached the Parador de los Gredos by midday and quickly located a pair of **Citril Finches** feeding on the lawn beside the hotel. In the pines around were **Goldcrest**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Coal Tit** and a group of **Crossbills**. We then took the road to the Plataforma, stopping for a short walk at the Puente del Duque where we found **Pied Flycatcher** and heard **Firecrest**. A group of **Carrion Crows** were present, a species absent from the Trujillo area. Our drive to the Plataforma took us above the tree-line and we found **Ortolan Buntings** singing and a **Yellow Wagtail** (Iberian form) beside a stream. **Dunnocks** and **Whitethroats** sang from the scrub. At the car park at the end of the road (the so-called Plataforma) we watched **Rock Buntings** and **Water Pipit**, as well as more **Ortolans**. **Skylark** sang overhead. The area for **Bluethroats** and **Rock Thrushes** was a little too far ahead for Pete to comfortably manage, but we enjoyed the scenery, the fine weather and the impressive Ibex that stood on the skyline.

It was a fitting end to an excellent week. We had seen all of the species that had been particularly targeted and found plenty of time to look for and photograph butterflies.

BIRDS RECORDED

The objective of the tour was to see certain target species and dedicate time for butterflies, whilst maintaining a gentle pace and avoiding difficult walks. Though a long list was not the priority, a very satisfying overall list of 152 bird species were recorded, as well as about 35 butterflies.

Species seen only on 18th May in the Gredos mountains (when we were outside Extremadura) are listed after the main list.

1. **Little Grebe:** Present on small pools in the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and in similar habitat on the ricefields.
2. **Great Crested Grebe:** pairs present at Arrocampo, the reservoirs of Sierra Brava and Guadiloba and Monfragüe.
3. **Black-necked Grebe:** A pair seen rather distantly at Sierra Brava.
4. **Little Bittern:** Several seen at Arrocampo.
5. **Squacco Heron:** one in flight at Arrocampo on 17th May.
6. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Several seen at Arrocampo.
7. **Cattle Egret:** Seen almost daily, with colonies on Belen Plains.
8. **Little Egret:** Seen on the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
9. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
10. **Purple Heron:** Several seen at Arrocampo.
11. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe and over the Rio Tamuja.
12. **White Stork:** A common bird seen daily.
13. **Grey Lag Goose:** Two at Casas del Hito.
14. **Gadwall:** Pairs present on small pool near Santa Marta de Magasca and at Arrocampo.
15. **Mallard:** Seen almost daily.
16. **Red-crested Pochard:** About 20 at Casas del Hito on 13th May.
17. **Pochard:** About 5 at Casas del Hito on 13th May.
18. **Black-winged Kite:** One seen at Casas del Hito on 13th May and pair at Arrocampo on 17th May.

19. **Black Kite:** Very common and seen every day. Flock of 50 seen over plains near Zorita on 13th May.
20. **Red Kite:** Seen almost daily, but less common than previous species.
21. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen at Monfragüe, along Rio Almonte, in Villuercas and at Valdecañas.
22. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen every day.
23. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
24. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
25. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen near Madrigalejo and at Arrocampo.
26. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen on plains south of Zorita and in good numbers on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
27. **Sparrowhawk:** One over Portilla del Tietár in Monfragüe.
28. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost daily.
29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Superb views of the breeding pair with nestling at Monfragüe,
30. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
31. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Excellent views of a pair in Monfragüe and an adult with juvenile along Rio Tamuja south of Santa Marta de Magasca.
32. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen every day.
33. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost every day.
34. **Peregrine Falcon:** Good views of a pair at Cabañas del Castillo.
35. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen most days.
36. **Quail:** Calling birds on Zorita plains .
37. **Moorhen:** Seen on small farmland ponds.
38. **Purple Swamphen:** Good views, including an adult with two chicks at Arrocampo.
39. **Common Coot:** Recorded at Sierra Brava and Arrocampo.
40. **Little Bustard:** Good views obtained of about six birds near Santa Marta de Magasca.

41. **Great Bustard:** Flock of males seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
42. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on recently flooded rice fields near Madrigalejo, pools near Santa Marta de Magasca and Arrocampo.
43. **Stone Curlew:** One seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
44. **Collared Pratincole:** Present over maize fields near Palazuelo.
45. **Little Ringed Plover:** Present at pools near Madrigalejo and along Rio Tamuja.
46. **Greenshank:** One bird on rice fields near Madrigalejo on 13th May.
47. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Sierra Brava.
48. **Black-headed Gull:** Well over a hundred present on and over rice fields near Madrigalejo.
49. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** One with Black-headed Gulls at Madrigalejo.
50. **Gull-billed Tern:** Recorded at Arrocampo, on rice fields and at colony at Sierra Brava.
51. **Little Tern:** A pair at Sierra Brava.
52. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Group of about eight seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
53. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen occasionally.
54. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
55. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
56. **Turtle Dove:** Seen almost daily.
57. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Two near Zorita on 13th May and one at Arrocampo on 17th May.
58. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard and sometimes seen almost daily.
59. **Scops Owl:** Heard every evening at Pago de San Clemente.
60. **Eagle Owl:** Excellent views of adult and two chicks in Monfragüe on 15th May.
61. **Little Owl:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Madrigalejo.

- 62. Red-necked Nightjar:** Heard most evenings at El Recuerdo with sightings of birds hunting on a couple of occasions.
- 63. Alpine Swift:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo, Rio Almonte and Monfragüe.
- 64. Common Swift:** Seen daily.
- 65. Pallid Swift:** Seen in Trujillo.
- 66. White-rumped Swift:** Good views at Monfragüe castle.
- 67. Kingfisher:** Seen at Arroyo de la Vid, Rio Tamuja and Arrocampo.
- 68. Bee-eater:** Common and seen daily.
- 69. Roller:** Superb views of birds near Madrigalejo, Palazuelo and Santa Marta de Magasca.
- 70. Hoopoe:** Common and seen daily.
- 71. Great Spotted Woodpecker:** One seen at Monfragüe, near Berzocana and Cabañas del Castillo.
- 72. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Pair at Monfragüe on 12th May and heard near Berzocana on 16th May.
- 73. Calandra Lark:** Common on open plains.
- 74. Short-toed Lark:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Zorita.
- 75. Crested Lark:** Common and seen daily.
- 76. Thekla Lark:** Common and seen almost daily.
- 77. Woodlark:** Seen almost daily, also heard most nights from El Recuerdo.
- 78. Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
- 79. Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
- 80. Barn Swallow:** Common and seen daily.
- 81. Red-rumped Swallow:** Common and seen daily.
- 82. House Martin:** Common and seen daily.
- 83. Grey Wagtail:** One on Rio Almonte south of Monroy.
- 84. White Wagtail:** Seen daily.

85. **Wren:** Seen at Monfragüe and Cabañas del Castillo.
86. **Robin:** Seen at Monfragüe and Cabañas del Castillo.
87. **Nightingale:** Widespread and recorded daily.
88. **Black Redstart:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo and Monfragüe.
89. **Stonechat:** Common and seen daily.
90. **Black-eared Wheatear:** One seen at Monfragüe on 12th May.
91. **Black Wheatear:** Male at Cabañas del Castillo.
92. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen most days in suitable habitat.
93. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
94. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen in dehesa near Santa Marta de Magasca.
95. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded at Monfragüe, the rice fields and Arrocampo.
96. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen and heard almost daily.
97. **Savi's Warbler:** Present at Arrocampo.
98. **Reed Warbler:** Recorded at Arrocampo and Palazuelo.
99. **Great Reed Warbler:** Singing birds at Arrocampo, Palazuelo and Talavan
100. **Melodious Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
101. **Dartford Warbler:** Good views on the heath at Jaraicejo.
102. **Spectacled Warbler:** Good views on the heath at Jaraicejo.
103. **Subalpine Warbler:** Present at Arroyo de la Vid at Jaraicejo and Cabañas del Castillo.
104. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
105. **Blackcap:** Recorded at Palazuelo and in the Villuercas.
106. **Bonelli's Warbler:** One singing near Berzocana on 16th May.
107. **Spotted Flycatcher:** One at Cabañas del Castillo on 16th May.
108. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on several days.
109. **Crested Tit:** Recorded at Monfragüe on 12th May

- 110. Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
- 111. Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
- 112. Nuthatch:** Recorded in the Villuercas mountains.
- 113. Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo and Monfragüe.
- 114. Penduline Tit:** Fledglings being fed along Rio Ruercus near Palazuelo and adults seen at Arrocampo.
- 115. Golden Oriole:** Seen and heard most days.
- 116. Southern Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
- 117. Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
- 118. Jay:** Seen in Monfragüe and the Villuercas.
- 119. Azure-winged Magpie:** Common and seen daily.
- 120. Magpie:** Common and seen daily.
- 121. Jackdaw:** Common and seen daily.
- 122. Raven:** Common and seen daily.
- 123. Spotless Starling:** Common and seen daily.
- 124. House Sparrow:** Common and seen daily.
- 125. Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost every day.
- 126. Tree Sparrow:** Seen in the ricefields near Palazuelo.
- 127. Rock Sparrow:** Seen at the Arroyo de la Vid at Jaraicejo and Cabañas del Castillo.
- 128. Common Waxbill:** Seen at Rio Ruercus near Palazuelo.
- 129. Red Avadavat:** Common in reed-filled ditches near Palazuelo and seen at Arrocampo.
- 130. Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
- 131. Serin:** Common and seen daily.
- 132. Greenfinch:** Seen at Monfragüe and along Rio Almonte.

133. Goldfinch: Common and seen daily.

134. Linnet: Seen almost daily.

135. Hawfinch: One seen in flight in Monfragüe on 15th May and near Berzocana on 16th May.

136. Cirl Bunting: Recorded at Monfragüe, Arroyo de la Vid and near Berzocana.

137. Rock Bunting: Seen at Monfragüe and along Rio Almonte south of Monroy.

138. Corn Bunting: Common and seen daily.

Additional species seen at the Gredos Mountains

139: Skylark

140: Water Pipit

141: Yellow Wagtail

142: Dunnock

143: Northern Wheatear

144: Common Whitethroat

145: Goldcrest

146: Firecrest

147: Coal Tit

148: Pied Flycatcher

149: Carrion Crow

150: Citril Finch

151: Common Crossbill

152: Ortolan Bunting

Butterflies

Swallowtail 14/5

Scarce swallowtail 16/5

Spanish festoon 16/5, 17/5

Large white Common and widely distributed

Small white Common and widely distributed

Bath white Common and widely distributed

Orange tip 12/5, 16/5

Moroccan orange tip 18/5

Clouded yellow Common and widely distributed

Berger's clouded yellow Common and widely distributed

Cleopatra 14/5, 17/5

Spanish purple hairstreak 12/5, 14/5, 15/5, 17/5

False ilex hairstreak 14/5, 17/5

Small copper Common and widely distributed

Holly blue	12/5, 17/5
Green-underside blue	16/5, 17/5
Black-eyed blue	17/5
Panoptes blue	17/5
? Mazarine blue	
Common blue	17/5
Southern white admiral	16/5
Large tortoiseshell	12/5
Red admiral	11/5, 15/5, 16/5, 18/5
Painted lady	13/5, 16/5
Small tortoiseshell	18/5
Cardinal	16/5
Queen of Spain fritillary	15/5, 16/5
Iberian marbled white	Common and widely distributed
Spanish marbled white	14/5, 15/5, 17/5
Meadow brown	Common and widely distributed
Spanish gatekeeper	Common and widely distributed
Small heath	14/5, 15/5, 17/5
Dusky heath	15/5
Speckled wood	16/5, 17/5
? Lulworth skipper	17/5
? Small skipper	13/5
? Silver-spotted skipper	17/5
Mallow skipper	17/5