

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

SPRING TOUR 6th April 2011 – 13th April 2011

Guests: Fred and Win Bridges

Guide: Martin Kelsey

Itinerary

6th April 2011: Collection midday at Madrid Airport and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, Pago de San Clemente, Trujillo.

7th April 2011: Plains south of Zorita and the rice-growing area near Madrigalejo (Palazuelo and Casas del Hito).

8th April 2011: Arrocampo Reservoir, Valdecañas and Cerro de Almaráz

9th April 2011: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Belén plains.

10th April 2011: Heath land and cork oak woodland near Jaraicejo and Villuercas mountains.

11th April 2011: Monfragüe National Park.

12th April 2011: Plains south of Zorita and the rice-growing area near Madrigalejo (Palazuelo, Moheda Alta and Casas del Hito).

13th April 2011: Belén Plains and then transfer back to Madrid airport.

TRIP REPORT

6th April 2011

Fred and Win arrived just shortly after the scheduled arrival time and we were soon loading up the vehicle and heading on the ring-road around the south of Madrid. The traffic was generally flowing well and it was not long before we were Extremadura-bound on the A5 motorway, heading south-west. It was a hot and rather hazy day, but the snow on the peaks of the Gredos mountains was visible and as we crossed into Extremadura, we started seeing more **White Storks**, **Black Kites** and **Griffon Vultures**. We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo just before 5 pm.



7th April 2011

Today we headed south with still a rather hazy sky, but with the promise to clear later on. As it did the temperatures quickly rose to the high 20s. We spent the morning on the plains south of the town of Zorita. They lie on a plateau with wonderful views towards mountain ranges. At our first stop we managed to find a displaying **Great Bustard**, a round white bob standing out in the field. There were a few other **Great Bustards** in the general vicinity. **Calandra Larks** and **Zitting Cisticolas** sang as we watched the bird, but there were also the botanic distractions: the little road being lined by French Lavender with Yellow Toadflax in flower as well. We proceeded along the road, stopping to get a better view of

the bustards and finding a fine male **Little Bustard** standing in the middle of a track in full view, displaying. **Stone Curlews** called from the fields and **Corn Buntings** teased us on the fences. Just a few hundred metres further on we were met with the bizarre sight of an **Osprey** standing in the middle of a field, with two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flying off in the same field of view – now there is an interesting combination!

Other evidence of migration was the numbers of **Northern Wheatear**, a couple of **Whitethroats** and a female **Common Redstart** on a fence. As we proceeded across the plains we saw a **Roller** and wonderful views of **Lesser Kestrel**, a fine male **Montagu's Harrier** and superbly close views of a group of **Collared Pratincoles**. What a morning!



We left the plains, descending to the rice-growing area, where most of fields were dry earth, waiting for sowing in a few weeks time. **Bee-eaters** swooped over the fields and settled on the banks between the paddies. Where ploughing was underway, there were groups of **White Storks**. Stopping at the wooded watercourse of the Ruercas River, we were surrounded by the sound of **Nightingales**, **Cetti's Warblers** and **Great Reed Warblers**. Parties of **Red Avadavat** and a flock of **Common Waxbill** were also present. Beside the old railway line nearby, now a long-distance footpath, a migrant **Western Bonelli's Warbler** was singing.

After lunch we drove to another area of rice-fields, near a farm called Casas del Hito, where we visited a small pool. There were groups of **Gull-billed Tern** present, some **Black-winged Stilts** and a couple of pairs of **Little Ringed**

Plovers. Returning to the large reservoir of Sierra Brava, a small party of **Green Sandpiper** flew up from a feeder canal whilst an old barn provided a home for seemingly a dozen or more **Lesser Kestrels**.

We returned home for coffee and the checklist, with Fred heading out for an evening walk to listen to **Scops Owls**.

8th April 2011

It was another hot and sunny day, rather clearer than yesterday, with sometimes enough of a breeze to take the edge of the heat.

We visited the reservoir of Arrocampo, one of the best areas for breeding wetland birds in Extremadura. Our first stop, close to the start of the area produced a fine **Black-winged Kite** perched on a pylon. From there we visited a series of viewpoints and had excellent views of **Savi's Warblers**, **Purple Swamphen** and **Purple Heron** amongst others. Other species included **Bearded Tit**, a **Tawny Pipit** and several **Yellow Wagtails**. Taking a small road to the north of the town of Saucedilla we were rewarded with excellent views of **Bee-eaters**, coming to potential nest sites on a nearby bank. But the most unusual sighting of all was, without doubt, an exceptionally late **Common Crane**, which flew across the lake, then headed towards us, passing within just a few metres at eye-level.



We moved to a shady small valley for lunch, in an area of mixed woodland, where four species of orchid were found growing beside the road: **Yellow Bee**,

Naked Man, Sawfly and Spider. The area was good as well with raptors such as **Short-toed** and **Booted Eagles**, all three species of vulture, **Sparrowhawk** and two species of Kite. Whilst we ate a rather tired and possibly unwell **Iberian Chiffchaff** was resting and then feeding on a bare tree.



From there we descended to the Cerro de Almaráz where we had a very productive afternoon finding a total of eight orchid species (in addition to those already given: **Champaign, Conical, Mirror** and **Woodcock**). A **Willow Warbler** sang from higher up the slope, whilst nearer at hand **Nightingales, Chaffinches** and **Sardinian Warblers** sang from the olives.

We headed back home with pause at the bull ring of Trujillo to watch the **Lesser Kestrels**. At home, Fred sat and watched the **Hoopoe** that nests on the garden.

9th April 2011

The hot weather continued today, but we were out early on the plains to the east of Santa Marta de Magasca where we started the morning with excellent views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** feeding in very good light and with no hint of heat haze. Their exquisite plumage with dappled markings on their back and orange breasts contrasting with pure white underparts was easy to see. Parties took off, calling as they wheeled against the blue sky. **Calandra Larks** also abounded and further along the road we also had close views in good light of a **Whinchat** and **Thekla Lark** close to each other. Two **Great Bustards** flew across the road. We headed north along a dirt road, having good views of **Tawny Pipit**, as well as more **Whinchats, Crested Larks** and **Short-toed**

Larks. We saw further **Great Bustards**, as well as a couple of distant **Little Bustards**. Raptors were also evident: A juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, **Red** and **Black Kite**, and **Black** and **Griffon Vulture**. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** called in the distance and occasionally flew over high over head. There were also a few **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, hut they stayed rather too far away to get sound recordings of.



After a short stop in the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we visited a breeding area of **Montagu's Harrier** where birds displayed near and far. A **Sawfly Orchid** was in flower beside the parked car and we watched **Black Kites** chase a male **Montagu's Harrier**, forcing it skua-like to drop the prey it was carrying. Lunch was taken beside the River Magasca, a **Kingfisher** being the main highlight there, as well as **Crag Martins** and **Red-rumped Swallows**.

After lunch we returned to the harriers and then proceeded slowly along the road, but it was rather quiet in the heat of the afternoon. So we drove to the plains of Belén, where we had a very productive final hour of the day with further sightings of **Great Bustard**, more **Whinchats** and best of all, some excellent views of **Bee-eaters** close to the road.

After dinner, Fred went out for another evening walk, his patience paying off with sightings of two **Long-eared Owls**, as well as hearing **Scops** and **Little Owls** calling.

10th April 2011

A perfect morning for the heaths: still and sunny. We explored the lavender and broom heath land near Jaraicejo, a place full of birdsong and where we had great views in this wonderful place of **Spectacled** and **Dartford Warblers**, as well as **Thekla Larks**, **Corn Buntings** and **Iberian Grey Shrikes**. The heath dropped down to a cork oak grove where a **Western Orphean Warbler** sang at the border and the attractive woodland had the sounds of **Nuthatch**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Nightingale** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**. Another **Western Orphean Warbler** sang from the northern edge of the grove. By the time we returned across the heath, **Large Psammmodromus** and **Spanish Rock Lizards** were coming out on the path. Close by we stopped for coffee beside a small reservoir, where yet another **Western Orphean Warbler** sang, whilst two **Hoopoes** sang in competition, almost in a chorus with a **Common Cuckoo**.

We then headed east to the edge of the Villuercas mountains, stopping for lunch at the beautiful Almonte gorge south of Retamosa. A colourful male **Grey Wagtail** hawked insects beside the flowing water. After lunch we spent the rest of the afternoon in a belt of cork oak woodland below some rocky crags. **Red-billed Choughs** mobbed **Ravens** above us and once a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** appeared. Around us the place seemed to have **Nuthatches** everywhere, as well as a large herd of wandering goats, their bells ringing across the valley. But we also found a singing male **Common Redstart**, two **Subalpine Warblers** singing in competition and just as we were leaving calls from a **Crested Tit** at close quarters, hopefully making a good recording!



11th April 2011

Today our destination was the Monfragüe National Park and again we would enjoy fine, sunny weather all day. We drove up the A5 motorway to enter the park from the north, making our first stop beside the Tietar river at the Portilla del Tietar. Several birders were already present and a French party had located an adult **Eagle Owl** perched in a small cork oak tree. There we watched it during our stay, sometimes it was resting, at other times preening, sometimes raising its monstrous talons. Its chick was also visible, standing close to the edge of the nest site. As well as **Black Storks** and **Griffon Vultures**, we saw a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle** fly over, but we also enjoyed watching smaller birds, such as a pair of very obliging **Rock Buntings**. It was a lovely spot. We moved on for a late coffee at the Tajadilla viewpoint, where more **Griffon Vultures** were present and parties of **Greenfinches** and **Goldfinches** fed from the drying elm seeds. A bit further along the road we had excellent views of two male **Black-eared Wheatears** in a territorial dispute. After a brief pause at the Visitors' Centre, we had lunch in a shady spot near the bridge over the Tajo river, where we were able to watch **Alpine Swifts** and hordes of **House Martins**, whilst a **Blackcap** sang close by.

Our final spot was at the Salto del Gitano. Here we could look down onto a **Black Storks'** nest with four white eggs, as well as **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Bunting** and **Black Redstart**. We had prolonged, if rather distant, views of **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and also saw **Short-toed Eagle** (including three together), a **Booted Eagle** and **Peregrine**. A **Western Bonelli's Warbler** gave a couple of bursts of song as we arrived.

12th April 2011

Today we retraced our steps of the first day, stopping briefly at the Sierra Brava reservoir, particularly to see the **Lesser Kestrels** in the ruined barn there and then to the pool in the rice fields of Casas del Hito. As we arrived, parties of **Gull-billed Terns** hunted over the fields. On the embankment surrounding the pool migrant warblers were present, giving snatches of song: **Western Bonelli's** and **Willow Warblers**, whilst a newly arrived **Melodious Warbler** sang just metres from a **Nightingale** and **Cetti's Warbler**. On the pool itself were a party of **Gull-billed Terns** and **Whiskered Terns**. As we started to scan the shingle beaches in the pool more carefully so waders started to be found: pairs of **Little Ringed Plover** and **Kentish Plover**, a migrant flock of **Ringed Plover** resting along with a couple of **Dunlin**, six **Little Stint** feeding, a **Lapwing** and several **Black-winged Stilts**. We were particularly pleased to find a **Stone Curlew** standing on one of the shingle bank. There were also a few **Collared Pratincoles** present too. Whilst we watched, a **Spoonbill** flew in and started feeding. It had been an excellent first stop. Our next stop, on the fine and sunny day, was the bridge over a river where a couple of **Great Reed Warblers** thundered out their song at us. **Reed Warblers** and **Sedge Warblers** were also present. We paid a short visit to a pool near Moheda Alta, but the water level as very high and only a few **Mallard** were present. However, whilst we were there a party of about 40 **Collared Pratincole** flew over. We had lunch

in the *dehesa* of Moheda Alta, where hundreds of **Tongue Orchids** were in bloom.



We completed our day, returning to the plains near Campo Lugar. There we saw three **Montagu's Harriers** but pride of place were a pair of **Roller** which afforded us excellent views in the afternoon light. It was noticeable that in the week that had passed since our last visit, the landscape had become more parched, as a result of the dry weather and unseasonably high temperatures.

13th April 2011

For our final morning in Extremadura we elected to travel slowly across the Belén Plains, north-east of Trujillo. It was another calm, sunny and warm morning and we enjoyed the sight of **Bee-eaters** on the wires, as well as displaying **Great Bustards** and a calling **Little Bustard**. As on everyday on the plains, there were larks singing everywhere around us and migration was still evident by the presence of **Whinchats** on the wires and some **Northern Wheatears**.



As we left the plains, we made a short stop in the wonderful old main square of Trujillo where packs of **Pallid** and **Common Swifts** chased, **Lesser Kestrels** drifted over the rooftops and **White Storks** surveyed the scene from their lofty nests. Back at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we had lunch and then bade our farewells and started the journey back to Madrid. The traffic was light and we arrived at the airport in good time for the check-in back home.

List of species seen

Particular attention was made on this holiday to obtain sound recordings of birds, rather than maximising a species list, nevertheless a very good total of **153 species of birds were noted**. These are listed below.

1. **Little Grebe**: Present on small pool on Belén plains.
2. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Arrocampo reservoirs.
3. **Great Cormorant**: Seen at Arrocampo.
4. **Cattle Egret**: Seen almost daily.
5. **Little Egret**: Seen almost daily.
6. **Great Egret**: Three seen at Arrocampo on 8th April.
7. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
8. **Purple Heron**: Several at Arrocampo on 8th April.
9. **Black Stork**: One seen over the rice fields on 7th April and several in the Villuercas mountains and at Monfragüe.
10. **White Stork**: Seen daily.
11. **Spoonbill**: One at pool in Casas del Hito on 12th April.
12. **Gadwall**: Seen at Arrocampo.
13. **Teal**: Single figures seen on pool at Casas del Hito on both visits.
14. **Mallard**: Seen almost daily.
15. **Shoveler**: A pair at Casas del Hito on both visits.
16. **Black-winged Kite**: One near Arrocampo on 8th April
17. **Black Kite**: Seen daily.
18. **Red Kite**: Seen almost daily.
19. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
20. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
21. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
22. **Short-toed Eagle**: Seen almost daily.

23. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
24. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
25. **Sparrowhawk:** Recorded near Valdecañas.
26. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** One juvenile near Santa Marta de Magasca and two adults in Monfragüe.
28. **Booted Eagle:** Seen daily.
29. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Two in Villuercas mountains.
30. **Osprey:** One near campo Lugar on 7th April.
31. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen everyday, especially at Trujillo and on the plains.
32. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
33. **Peregrine Falcon:** One at Monfragüe on 11th April.
34. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen or heard almost daily.
35. **Quail:** Heard on plains near Campo Lugar and on rice fields.
36. **Moorhen:** Seen in suitable habitat.
37. **Purple Swamphen:** Several seen at Arrocampo on 8th April.
38. **Common Crane:** 1 at Arrocampo on 8th April.
39. **Little Bustard:** A male displaying and two seen in flight on Campo Lugar road on 7th April, also seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Belén Plains.
40. **Great Bustard:** About 15 (including displaying males) seen on visits to Campo Lugar, Santa Marta de Magasca and Belén Plains.
41. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen almost daily.
42. **Stone Curlew:** One heard near Campo Lugar on 7th April and one present at pool at Casas del Hito on 12th April.
43. **Collared Pratincole:** Over 20 near Campo Lugar on 7th April and about 40 in total seen on rice fields on 12th April.
44. **Ringed Plover:** About 30 at Casas del Hito on 12th April.

45. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields and near Arrocampo.
46. **Kentish Plover:** About 8 on pool at Casas del Hito on 12th April.
47. **Northern Lapwing:** Singles present at pool in Casas del Hito on 7th and 12th April.
48. **Dunlin:** Two on pool at Casas del Hito on 12th April.
49. **Little Stint:** A flock of 10 at Casas del Hito on 12th April.
50. **Common Snipe:** One at Moheda Alta on 12th April.
51. **Common Redshank:** One at Arrocampo on 8th April.
52. **Greenshank:** Two on pool near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April
53. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on beside canals near Sierra Brava and at Arrocampo.
54. **Common Sandpiper:** One at Sierra Brava on 12th April.
55. **Whiskered Tern:** About 12 at Casas del Hito on 12th April.
56. **Gull-billed Tern:** About 30 present at Casas del Hito on both visits.
57. **Black-headed Gull:** Small numbers on Sierra Brava on both visits.
58. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Two near Campo Lugar on 7th April and about 10 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April and two at Casas del Hito on 12th April.
59. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** About 40 seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
60. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** See daily.
61. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
62. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
63. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** One on Belén Plains on 13th April was only record.
64. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard daily and several sightings.
65. **Scops Owl:** Calling each evening in Pago de San Clemente.
66. **Eagle Owl:** Adult and chick seen in Monfragüe on 11th April.

67. **Little Owl:** Seen on Campo Lugar road and Belén plains and heard most evenings at Pago de San Clemente.
68. **Long-eared Owl:** One or two seen most evenings at Pago de San Clemente.
69. **Red-necked Nightjar:** Calling and one sighting from 10th April at Pago de San Clemente.
70. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at River Tajo on 6th April and 11th April.
71. **Pallid Swift:** Seen in Trujillo.
72. **Common Swift:** Seen in Trujillo.
73. **Kingfisher:** One along Rio Magasca.
74. **Bee-eater:** Seen daily.
75. **Roller:** Seen on both visits to Campo Lugar road (7th and 12th April).
76. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
77. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen near Rio Ruercas and Monfragüe.
78. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard drumming twice at Pago de San Clemente and also recorded at Jaraicejo.
79. **Calandra Lark:** Seen almost daily.
80. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on plains.
81. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost daily.
82. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
83. **Woodlark:** Seen almost daily.
84. **Sand Martin:** Present at Arrocampo and near Monfragüe.
85. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
86. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
87. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
88. **House Martin:** Seen daily.

89. **Tawny Pipit:** One at Arrocampo on 8th April and one near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
90. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
91. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on Campo Lugar road and at Arrocampo.
92. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on Rio Almonte on 10th April.
93. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
94. **Wren:** Recorded almost daily.
95. **Robin:** Singing in Monfragüe, near Valdecañas and the Villuercas.
96. **Nightingale:** Seen and/or heard daily.
97. **Black Redstart:** Seen at Monfragüe.
98. **Common Redstart:** A female on Campo Lugar road on 7th April and a male singing near Cabañas del Castillo on 10th April.
99. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Whinchat:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April and on Belén Plains on 13th April.
101. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen almost daily.
102. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Two males and a female in Monfragüe on 11th April.
103. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Several seen in Monfragüe.
104. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
105. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen in Villuercas mountains on 10th April.
106. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen or heard almost daily.
107. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Savi's Warbler:** Several singing at Arrocampo on 8th April.
109. **Sedge Warbler:** One singing in cereal field on Campo Lugar road on 7th April and also seen at Arrocampo and on rice fields.
110. **Reed Warbler:** Singing at Arrocampo and on rice fields.

111. **Great Reed Warbler:** Singing on Rio Ruercas on 7th April and elsewhere on rice fields on 12th April.
112. **Melodious Warbler:** One singing at Casas del Hito on 12th April.
113. **Dartford Warbler:** Several in song at Jaraicejo on 10th April.
114. **Spectacled Warbler:** At least two singing at Jaraicejo on 10th April.
115. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Monfragüe and in the Villuercas mountains.
116. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
117. **Western Orphean Warbler:** At least three singing at Jaraicejo on 10th April.
118. **Common Whitethroat:** Passage birds seen on Campo Lugar road on 7th April and near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th.
119. **Blackcap:** Recorded at Valdecañas and Monfragüe.
120. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** One singing near Rio Ruercas on 7th April, heard in Monfragüe 11th April and one singing at Casas del Hito on 12th April.
121. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** One near Valdecañas 8th April.
122. **Willow Warbler:** Heard almost daily.
123. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
124. **Crested Tit:** Recorded in Villuercas mountains on 10th April.
125. **Blue Tit:** Seen daily.
126. **Great Tit:** Seen daily.
127. **Bearded Tit:** A male at Arrocampo 8th April
128. **Nuthatch:** Seen at Jaraicejo and the Villuercas mountains on 10th April.
129. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen and/or heard almost daily.
130. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
131. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.

132. **Jay:** Recorded at Valdecañas and in the Villuercas mountains.
133. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
134. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
135. **Red-billed Chough:** Recorded in Villuercas mountains on 10th April.
136. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
137. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
138. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
139. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
140. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
141. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
142. **Rock Sparrow:** Singing in Jaraicejo on 10th April.
143. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
144. **Red Avadavat:** Many seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
145. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
146. **Serin:** Seen daily.
147. **Greenfinch:** Seen in Monfragüe.
148. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
149. **Linnet:** Seen in Monfragüe and rice fields.
150. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 10th April.
151. **Cirl Bunting:** Recorded in Valdecañas, near Santa Marta de Magasca and Villuercas mountains.
152. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe on 11th April.
153. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.