

## Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Spring Holiday 13<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Martin Kelsey

### Participants

Stuart and Sylvia Tate

### Itinerary

**13<sup>th</sup> April:** Pick-up at Madrid airport and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

**14<sup>th</sup> April:** Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.

**15<sup>th</sup> April:** Plains south of Zorita, Sierra Brava reservoir, Madrigalejo and Moheda Alta.

**16<sup>th</sup> April:** Heath land and cork oaks near Jaraicejo, Miravete Pass. Tozo reservoir.

**17<sup>th</sup> April:** Monfragüe National Park and Almonte River

**18<sup>th</sup> April:** Alange reservoir, Gadiana River and Roman Bridge Mérida.

**19<sup>th</sup> April:** Plains south of Zorita, Trujillo, Talaván and Guadiloba reservoirs

**20<sup>th</sup> April:** Arrocampo reservoir, Valdecañas and Charca Salado followed by return to Madrid airport for night flight.

The weather was varied, often overcast and with generally fresh windy conditions.

### 13<sup>th</sup> April

The evening flight from Manchester arrived about 30 minutes late, but the traffic was light and despite some rain on the journey we arrived safely at Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 00.30.

### 14<sup>th</sup> April

There was some rain at the start of the day, but that cleared although the winds remained fresh all day. We explored the area to the west of Trujillo. Stopping first in open plains where we quickly found **Little Bustard**. **Corn Bunting** song surrounded us as did that of **Thekla** and **Crested Lark**. A fine male **Montagu's Harrier** quartered the fields and an **Iberian Grey Shrike** perched nearby. From the same viewpoint we also found our first **Great Bustards**. Along the road we had excellent views of a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and then stopped to scan a large field where we found a flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. Although distant, their bright orange breasts contrasting with their whiter bellies, as well as their spangled upperparts could be seen very well. A little bit further on a **Booted Eagle** drifted overhead and we found small group of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** in a field, albeit rather distant.

The road then took us towards the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, where we stopped for coffee in the village, with the delightful distraction of **House Martins** building their nests close by.

Afterwards we stopped beside the Magasca River for lunch, where there were **Crag Martins** and **Kingfisher**. We then drove south getting distant views of a **Bonelli's Eagle** but much better ones of a pair of **Short-toed Lark**. Then it was back to Trujillo and thence to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

### 15<sup>th</sup> April

It felt colder today, rather windy but generally sunny. We visited the plains south of the town of Zorita (having a very close encounter with a **Red Kite** en route), enjoying excellent views of displaying **Great Bustards**, as well as **Little Bustards**. Close by was a party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** as well as a group of four **Whimbrel** and a **Golden Plover**. **Calandra Larks** were also seen well on the ground. We then visited the reservoir of Sierra Brava where we had wonderful views of a male **Black-eared Wheatear** and brief glimpses of a **Stone Curlew**, being blown over in the wind! We then headed onto the rice-growing area, although the fields were mainly ploughed (a few remaining as stubble) and all dry. **Cetti's Warblers** were heard frequently and we saw several **Marsh Harriers**, as well as parties of **Red Avadavats** and **Common Waxbills**.

After coffee at Obando, we stopped at a small pool and found a group of waders including **Lapwing**, **Little Stint**, **Ruff**, and **Dunlin**. There was a noisy colony of **Spanish Sparrows** in the middle of a bramble thicket – a wonderful sight. We had lunch nearby at Moheda Alta and then returned past Madrigalejo where a group of **Gull-billed Terns** flew close-by, taking a road past Fernando V to Palazuelo, where we had fine views of a **Roller** and **Tree Sparrows**. We completed the day with a return to the plains near Campo Lugar, not finding any more Stone Curlew but getting good views of an immature **Long-legged Buzzard**.

### 16<sup>th</sup> April

The day was calm and sunny: ideal for visiting heath land habitat near Jaraicejo for warblers. **Dartford Warblers** were particularly active, some clearly with young already in nests as they were seen carrying food. An obliging **Spectacled Warbler** sang for a long time atop a broom bush, whilst in a tree close to where we were standing a **Western Orphean Warbler** was also seen well. The adjacent Cork Oak woodland provided an attractive setting for a range of woodland species such as **Nuthatch** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**. We also had beautifully close views of a Short-toed Eagle, then joined by its mate, the pair then proceeding to display. Then, following coffee we went to pinewoods just a few kilometres away at the Miravete Pass away, where we enjoyed further views of **Short-toed Treecreeper** as well as **Crested Tit**. Both **Rock Bunting** and **Cirl Bunting** were also seen.

In the afternoon, we stopped for a walk beside the River Tozo, through *dehesa* to the Tozo reservoir, seeing several **Spoonbill**, **Greenshank**, **Black-winged Stilt** and the spectacle of a **Booted Eagle** stoop onto a group of flying Mallard and Gadwall.

### 17<sup>th</sup> April

It was another mostly sunny day with light winds. We headed north from Casa Rural El Recuerdo, passing through the small historic town of Trujillo which stands on an impressive granite outcrop and continuing northwards. Our route crossed an extensive landscape of *dehesa* or wood pasture, stretching as far as the eye could see. We entered the Monfragüe National Park from the north, through beautiful cork oak parkland where we stopped to see **Rock Sparrow**, and **Woodchat Shrike**. We then pulled in to park near the viewpoint Portilla del Tiétar. This is a wonderful spot, with a rocky crag beside the Tiétar river, with wooded hillsides. We were rewarded with magnificent views of a female **Eagle Owl** and her two chicks at their nest. Not to be outdone by that, a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** put on a superb show for us: we watched it perched, calling and soaring – all in excellent light. There were magnificent views also of **Black Stork** and **Griffon Vultures**.

Our next stop was at a viewpoint was the Higuera where a pair of **Egyptian Vultures** was also seen and a **Subalpine Warbler** was singing. We stopped next at the Tajadilla viewpoint, from where we could see another **Griffon Vulture** colony and had fine views of passing **Black Vulture**, whilst a group of **Red Deer** were watched crossing the river.

After a stop for coffee, we had lunch near the Cardinal's Bridge, enjoying again a nearby **Subalpine Warbler**. We then took a short walk beside the Tajo Rover, watching **Alpine Swifts** and a **Bonelli's Eagle** passing overhead. We completed our visit at the Salto del Gitano viewpoint, looking across at the impressive Peña Falcón rock face. As well as the numerous **Griffon Vultures**, we also watched a **Short-toed Eagle**, a brief appearance of two **Red-billed Chough** and good views of **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart**.

Finally, on our return south, we stopped beside the Almonte River for a short walk, getting good views of both **Grey** and **White Wagtails**.

### 18<sup>th</sup> April

The cold, windy and cloudy weather returned. We drove south-west, past the city of Mérida, south along the Guadiana river to the Alange reservoir. The dam holds the largest **Alpine Swift** colony in Extremadura and we enjoyed magnificent views. We then walked beside the reservoir, close to the crags on top of which is perched Alange castle. **Gull-billed Terns** passed by whilst **Rock Buntings** were seen on the crags. We found and had several good views of a male **Black Wheatear** and a very brief sighting of a **Bonelli's Eagle**. . Following coffee. we spent an hour or so walking along the gallery woodland of the Guadiana river, getting sightings of **Cetti's Warblers** and **Nightingales** as well as hearing a **Golden Oriole**. A **Booted Eagle** was seen overhead.

Following lunch there we drove briefly to the reservoir of Montijo, where we saw **Marsh Harriers** and had a brief sighting of **Golden Oriole**.

We ended the afternoon on the Roman Bridge at Mérida, spanning the Guadiana river and the longest surviving Roman bridge in the world. As well as its historic value, it is a great place to watch birds from and we managed to see **Purple Swamphen**, **Alpine** and **Pallid Swifts**, and a **Whiskered Tern**. Sylvia and Stuart met up with a Spanish friend, the bridge providing a perfect rendezvous spot!

### **19<sup>th</sup> April**

Another windy and generally cloudy day, with some light showers. We returned first of all to the plains south of Zorita in order to find Stone Curlew, but without success. Then the Tates had the chance for shopping in Trujillo, before we headed for lunch at the Talaván Reservoir. There we were rewarded with magnificently close views of a **Golden Eagle**, passing by at low altitude, against a fierce head wind. **Common Swifts** were also battling against the elements, whilst on the reservoir itself were **Mallard**, **Gadwall** and good numbers of **Little** and **Great Crested Grebe**. We had good views of a **Greenshank** as well as a **Booted Eagle**.

We then visited the Guadiloba reservoir near Cáceres, where we obtained close views of a pair of **Little Bustard** as well as **Egyptian Vulture**. Nearby, a **Little Owl** was seen peering out of a Roller nestbox. That evening on a walk close to the house, a **Long-eared Owl** was seen.

### **20<sup>th</sup> April**

It was cold and windy again today. We set off for a morning's birding at the Arrocampo reservoir. Despite the wind, **Savi's Warblers** sang on top of the reeds, and we had good views as well of **Purple Swamphen**, **Penduline Tit**, **Purple Heron** and **Black-crowned Night Heron**. A wonderful treat was watching a **Kingfisher** hovering for a considerable time close to where we were standing, its head held completely stationary. We had coffee in Saucedilla and then followed a road to find **Black-winged Kite** and great views of **Bee-eater**.

Lunch was had near the Valdecañas dam, but the wind had picked up considerably and any Golden Orioles present were evidently keeping low! So we then visited the Charca Salado where we found several **Spoonbill**, as well as four **Glossy Ibis**, and a nice selection of waders: **Little Ringed** and **Ringed Plover**, **Common Sandpiper** and a **Yellow Wagtail**.

Following a brief return visit to Arrocampo, where but just a quick glimpse of a male **Little Bittern** was on offer, we started our journey to Madrid, reaching the airport at 18.30.

## Annotated List of Species Recorded

### Birds

The following 147 species were recorded:

1. **Little Grebe** Seen on Tozo, Talaván and Arrocampo reservoirs.
2. **Great Crested Grebe** Seen at Tozo, Talaván, Alange and Arrocampo.
3. **Great Cormorant** Seen on several days.
4. **Little Bittern** Seen briefly at Arrocampo.
5. **Black-crowned Night Heron** Several at Arrocampo.
6. **Cattle Egret** Seen almost everyday.
7. **Little Egret** Seen on several days.
8. **Great Egret** Seen at Alange and Arrocampo.
9. **Grey Heron** Seen almost everyday.
10. **Purple Heron** Seen at Alange, Mérida and Arrocampo.
11. **Black Stork** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca, Jaraicejo and at Monfragüe.
12. **White Stork** Seen everyday.
13. **Spoonbill** Five at Tozo reservoir and seen near Arrocampo.
14. **Glossy Ibis** Four near Arrocampo.
15. **Gadwall** Seen at Tozo, on Guadiana river, Talaván and at Arrocampo.
16. **Teal** Seen near Arrocampo.
17. **Mallard** Seen almost everyday.
18. **Shoveler** Small groups at Sierra Brava and Tozo.
19. **Black-winged Kite** One near Arrocampo.
20. **Black Kite** Common, seen everyday.
21. **Red Kite** Seen almost every day.
22. **Egyptian Vulture** Seen in Monfragüe, near Jaraicejo and Talaván.
23. **Griffon Vulture** Seen every day.
24. **Black Vulture** Seen almost every day.
25. **Short-toed Eagle** Seen almost every day.
26. **Marsh Harrier** Seen at Arrocampo, the Zorita steppes, Tozo, along Guadiana River and on the rice fields.
27. **Montagu's Harrier** Seen on several days.
28. **Common Buzzard** Seen almost everyday.
29. **Long-legged Buzzard** One on 15<sup>th</sup> April on plains near Zorita. This conforms to a plumage pattern recorded annually in Extremadura, although uncertainty remains whether these are pure Long-legged Buzzards or hybrids with Common Buzzard.
30. **Spanish Imperial Eagle** Two adults seen in Monfragüe.
31. **Golden Eagle** One at Talaván.
32. **Booted Eagle** Seen almost everyday.
33. **Bonelli's Eagle** One seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and in Monfragüe.
34. **Lesser Kestrel** Seen almost every day.
35. **Common Kestrel** Seen almost every day.

36. **Red-legged Partridge** Seen almost every day.
37. **Moorhen** Seen on several days.
38. **Purple Swamphen** Seen in Mérida and Arrocampo.
39. **Common Coot** Seen in Mérida, Talaván and Arrocampo.
40. **Little Bustard** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Zorita and near Guadiloba reservoir.
41. **Great Bustard** Seen, including displaying males, on Zorita plains and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
42. **Black-winged Stilt** Seen most days.
43. **Stone Curlew** One seen briefly near Sierra Brava reservoir.
44. **Ringed Plover** One near Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> April.
45. **Little Ringed Plover** Seen at Talaván and near Arrocampo.
46. **Golden Plover** One on Zorita plains on 15<sup>th</sup> April.
47. **Lapwing** Five on pool at Moheda Alta on 15<sup>th</sup> April.
48. **Dunlin** One at Moheda Alta on 15<sup>th</sup> April.
49. **Little Stint** Two at Moheda Alta on 15<sup>th</sup> April.
50. **Ruff** One at Moheda Alta on 15<sup>th</sup> April.
51. **Common Snipe** One along Tozo river on 16<sup>th</sup> April and at Charca Salado on 20<sup>th</sup> April.
52. **Greenshank** Seen at Moheda Alta, Talaván and Charca Salado.
53. **Green Sandpiper** Seen at Talaván and near Arrocampo.
54. **Common Sandpiper** One at Moheda Alta on 15<sup>th</sup> April.
55. **Whimbrel** Four on Zorita plains on 15<sup>th</sup> April.
56. **Whiskered Tern** One seen from Roman bridge, Mérida on 18<sup>th</sup> April.
57. **Gull-billed Tern** Several seen near Madrigalejo and at Alange.
58. **Black-headed Gull** Seen at Alange.
59. **Lesser Black-backed Gull** Seen on several days.
60. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Zorita plains.
61. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
62. **Feral Pigeon** Seen everyday.
63. **Wood Pigeon** Seen almost everyday.
64. **Collared Dove** Seen everyday.
65. **Great Spotted Cuckoo** Seen almost everyday.
66. **Common Cuckoo** Heard and/or seen almost every day.
67. **Scops Owl** Heard on several nights near Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
68. **Eagle Owl** Adult and two chicks seen at Monfragüe.
69. **Little Owl** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
70. **Long-eared Owl** Seen near El Recuerdo on 19<sup>th</sup> April.
71. **Alpine Swift** Seen at Alange and Monfragüe.
72. **Common Swift** Seen almost every day.
73. **Pallid Swift** Seen in Mérida, Trujillo and Arrocampo.
74. **Kingfisher** Seen on several days.
75. **Bee-eater** Seen almost every day.
76. **Roller** Seen near Madrigalejo and Zorita plains.
77. **Hoopoe** Seen everyday.
78. **Great Spotted Woodpecker** Seen near Mérida.
79. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** Recorded near El Recuerdo and at Jaraicejo.
80. **Calandra Lark** Seen on each visit to the plains.

81. **Short-toed Lark** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
82. **Crested Lark** Seen every day.
83. **Thekla Lark** Seen on several days.
84. **Woodlark** Seen at Miravete Pass, Tozo and Jaraicejo
85. **Sand Martin** Seen on several days.
86. **Crag Martin** Seen almost every day.
87. **Barn Swallow** Seen everyday.
88. **Red-rumped Swallow** Seen almost every day.
89. **House Martin** Seen every day.
90. **Yellow Wagtail** One at Charca Salado on 20<sup>th</sup> April.
91. **Grey Wagtail** Seen on River Almonte.
92. **White Wagtail** Seen almost everyday.
93. **Wren** Seen or heard most days.
94. **Robin** Recorded in Monfragüe and Valdecañas
95. **Nightingale** Recorded almost every day.
96. **Black Redstart** Seen on Monfragüe.
97. **Stonechat** Seen every day.
98. **Northern Wheatear** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Zorita.
99. **Black-eared Wheatear** Seen near Sierra Brava.
100. **Black Wheatear** A male seen at Alange.
101. **Blue Rock Thrush** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
102. **Blackbird** Seen everyday.
103. **Mistle Thrush** Seen at Monfragüe and singing at Jaraicejo, also at Miravete.
104. **Cetti's Warbler** Recorded most days.
105. **Zitting Cisticola** Recorded most days.
106. **Savi's Warbler** Several singing at Arrocampo.
107. **Sedge Warbler** Recorded at Mérida and at Arrocampo.
108. **Reed Warbler** Recorded along rivers in the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
109. **Great Reed Warbler** Recorded at Arrocampo.
110. **Dartford Warbler** Several seen at Jaraicejo.
111. **Spectacled Warbler** One seen at Jaraicejo.
112. **Subalpine Warbler** Seen in Monfragüe and Miravete.
113. **Sardinian Warbler** Recorded on several days.
114. **Western Orphean Warbler** One singing at Jaraicejo.
115. **Blackcap** Recorded at Jaraicejo, Monfragüe and Guadiana river.
116. **Long-tailed Tit** Seen on several days.
117. **Crested Tit** Several at Miravete Pass.
118. **Blue Tit** Seen almost every day.
119. **Great Tit** Seen almost every day.
120. **Nuthatch** Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
121. **Short-toed Treecreeper** Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
122. **Penduline Tit** Seen at Arrocampo.
123. **Golden Oriole** Heard at Jaraicejo and seen near Mérida.
124. **Iberian Grey Shrike** Seen almost every day.
125. **Woodchat Shrike** Seen on almost every day.
126. **Jay** Recorded at Monfragüe, Jaraicejo and Valdecañas.

127. **Azure-winged Magpie** Seen daily.
128. **Magpie** Seen daily.
129. **Red-billed Chough** Two at Monfragüe.
130. **Jackdaw** Seen almost daily.
131. **Raven** Seen almost every day.
132. **Spotless Starling** Seen every day.
133. **House Sparrow** Seen daily.
134. **Spanish Sparrow** Seen on several days, often in large flocks.
135. **Tree Sparrow** Seen on rice fields, including a mixed flock  
with Spanish Sparrow.
136. **Rock Sparrow** Seen at Monfragüe.
137. **Common Waxbill** Seen near Madrigalejo.
138. **Red Avadavat** Seen near Madrigalejo.
139. **Chaffinch** Seen almost every day.
140. **Serin** Seen almost every day.
141. **Greenfinch** Seen in Monfragüe, Mérida and on rice fields.
142. **Goldfinch** Seen every day.
143. **Linnet** Seen near Jaraicejo and Mérida.
144. **Hawfinch** Seen in Monfragüe.
145. **Girl Bunting** One singing at Miravete.
146. **Rock Bunting** Seen at Miravete and Alange.
147. **Corn Bunting** Seen every day.