

Birdingextremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Report for Charles and Mary Westwood

Short winter break 22nd Feb – 27th Feb 2012

Itinerary

22nd February 2012: Transfer from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

23rd February 2012: Plains of Campo Lugar and Sierra Brava reservoir, Madrigalejo and the rice fields of Vegas Altas and Palazuelo, Moheda Alta

24th February 2012: Monfragüe National Park

25th February 2012: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Talaván reservoir, Almonte River and Monroy road. Trujillo Bull Ring.

26th February 2012: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Arrocampo, Belén Plains.

27th February 2012: Transfer from Casa Rural El Recuerdo to Madrid.

The weather throughout the week was settled with clear skies and sunshine, sometimes with a fresh northerly wind.

22nd February 2012

Charles and Mary made very good time disembarking the aircraft from London and picking up their bags, so within twenty minutes or so of arrival they had been welcomed by Martin and we were on our way to the car park at Terminal 4. Following the M40 ring road around the southern flanks of Madrid, we reached the A5 motorway for Extremadura. Just outside Madrid, we stopped for lunch at the Esparteras bar for an excellent mixed salad. Thence it was nonstop to Trujillo, with the Gredos mountains to the north and the landscape getting more wooded and, notwithstanding the severe winter drought this year, somewhat more greener. **White Storks** were seen on nests and soaring beside the motorway and we also saw a **Black-winged Kite** as well as **Red Kite** on the journey. We arrived in time for tea at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, and for Charles and Mary to take a short walk along the lane.

23rd February 2012

We headed south east, through the small town of Zorita and then south towards Madrigalejo, crossing a plateau of plains, bordered by mountains to the east and north. We left the main road onto a minor road for Campo Lugar. We had barely done so when we saw our first **Great Bustards**. To the right a party of males was starting to lek, with sometimes three males getting into their impressive display. To the left for other birds, including what looked like a party of females, who did not appear particularly interested. On the other side of the road was a group of **Little Bustards**, a small winter flock, with at least one male starting to show breeding plumage. Beside them sat a female **Merlin**, which was later seen in hot pursuit of what was probably a **Meadow Pipit**. Just a little further on we found a small flock of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** on the ground and we had excellent views in good light. All the time, **Calandra Larks** were singing and **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover** were scattered across the plains.

We returned to the main road and made a brief stop at the Sierra Brava reservoir. Although most of the ducks were far away in dense rafts, we were able to see **Wigeon**, **Shoveler**, **Teal** and **Mallard**, whilst a **Black-necked Grebe** was found as well. Our first **Common Cranes** were seen and heard, albeit distantly, whilst a derelict barn had at least three pairs of **Lesser Kestrel** as well as a **Little Owl**.

Our next stop was the old railway station at Madrigalejo where dispersed on stony ground, amidst planted trees were at least six **Stone Curlew**. **House Martins** were coming to the eaves of the old building. Parties of **cranes**, some of them seemingly on migration were passing across our view.

Exploring some tracks behind the town of Vegas Altas, we came across wet and muddy fields amongst the rice stubble. Small groups of waders such as **Black-tailed Godwit** and **Snipe** were present and we had tantalizing views of two **Bluethroat** in flight, as well as better views of **Water Pipit**. Two **Water Rail** were watched at close range involved in a chase. Small groups of **cranes** were everywhere.

After stopping at Obando for coffee, we visited a small pool near Moheda Alta, where there were a good selection of ducks including **Pintail** and **Shoveler**, as well as some waders such as three **Avocet**. Lunch followed in the *dehesa* woodland of Moheda Alta and then we visited the observation tower, watching several hundred **Common Crane**, as well as a few waders and ducks on the rice stubble and small flooded fields. A fine female **Hen Harrier** quartered close by. We completed our visit to Moheda Alta calling in to see the exhibition on cranes.

Finally we took a road in the direction of Palazuelo, where we came across more muddy fields. There were good numbers of **cranes**, we had excellent views of **Water Pipits**, but best of all, rewarding views of a beautiful male **Bluethroat**, feeding at the edge of the field.

24th February 2012

Today we headed north from Trujillo through *dehesa* to Torrejón El Rubio and thence to the Monfragüe National Park. Our first stop was at the spectacular viewpoint of Salto de Gitano, looking across to the Peña Falcón rock face. The viewpoint was in morning shade and exposed to a biting north wind, but we did linger enough to enjoy close views of **Griffon Vulture**, **Black Vulture** as well as **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting**. We made a second stop overlooking the medieval Cardinal's bridge, seeing more **Griffon Vultures**, a **Hawfinch** singing in the thick foliage of a holm oak and hearing a single call from an **Eagle Owl**, somewhere in the crags above us. After coffee at Villareal de San Carlos, we continued our route, making a brief stop at the Tajadilla viewpoint, but long enough to get a superb view of a **Bonelli's Eagle** soaring close by.

From there we continued to the final viewpoint, a peaceful spot beside the River Tiétar. Here we watched an incubating **Eagle Owl**, well enough to see her blink! Simultaneously a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was found perched on a crag on the skyline, a magnificent view. The pair of eagles was also seen in flight, the perfect light illuminating the brilliant white leading edge to their wings.

We had lunch in a belt of pines, overlooking the river, where **Azure-winged Magpies** came down to take scraps and we spent some time searching for rather elusive **Hawfinch** and **Crested Tit**. Following a stop for refreshments at Villareal de San Carlos we ended the day with a very productive second visit to Salto de Gitano. An **Egyptian Vulture** soared against a deep blue sky whilst a pair of **Black Stork** soared with a backdrop of a wooded hillside. **Red Deer** were on the skyline. We had excellent views too of a female **Black Wheatear** which fly-catched from a rock below us.

25th February 2012

Today we headed westwards towards the provincial capital of Cáceres. En route we took a road for a few kilometres south-west of Santa Marta de Magasca. A party of 14 **Great Bustards**, appearing to be mainly females, were feeding at the edge of a cereal field whilst nearby there was a large mixed flock of **Black-headed Gulls** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** on a pool. A little further on we found a party of 12 **Great Bustards**, this time appearing to be all males, showing bright orange bands across their lower necks. Returning to the main road, we by-passed Cáceres to drive north, over the Almonte river and onto to the small reservoir of Talaván. A **Great Spotted Cuckoo** was seen briefly as we drove. Reaching the reservoir, we were watching **Little Grebe**, **Coot** and **Moorhen** when a swimming form was spotted at the back of the bay: an **Otter**! We watched it for minutes as it settled down to catch fish around a floating mass of reed mace, coming up onto flattened reeds to eat. As we walked along the bank of the reservoir, we saw the **Otter** again swimming to a nearby patch of floating reed mace where again it started fishing. We then watched it swim to the farther bank where again it delighted us with its fishing. The birds were not ignored, though. A **Thekla Lark** sang above us, parties of **Common Crane** were on migration in the distance and the small reservoir had some duck as well, including a party of **Common Pochard**.

We stopped for coffee in the attractive square of Monroy, where a pair of **White Storks** had residence on the corner of the bar's roof. It was then down to the nearby River Almonte. This beautiful steep wooded valley had an old derelict water mill and it was at the top of its access track that we set up the picnic. Just as we had sandwiches in hand, a juvenile **Golden Eagle** made an appearance, a rather brief one, but with good light and the opportunity of seeing it from several angles as it soared twice before drifting off.

After lunch we took the high road to Trujillo, stopping whenever we needed to view interesting fields. Reaching an old drovers' trail, we went for a short afternoon walk. **Western Dappled Whites** and **Clouded Yellows** were on the wing and we had a real show of **Calandra Larks**, as well as flocks of **Skylark**, **Meadow Pipits** and **Corn Buntings**. Back in Trujillo we stopped at the Bull Ring where we spent a memorable half an hour or so watching in glorious light at least three pairs of **Lesser Kestrel**, gliding, perching, chasing, even copulating (the same pair three times!). Not to be outplayed a male **Spotless Starling** sang with gusto on the top of a TV aerial, showing its lion's mane, as Mary aptly described its lax head and throat feathers.

26th February 2012

The morning started with a visit to the plains just to the west of Trujillo. This was extremely productive with prolonged and quite close views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, an opportunity to study a pair of **Thekla Lark** nearby, a flock of 28 **Little Bustards** on the ground as well as in flight, as well as parties of **Great Bustard** in flight. Again **Calandra Larks** accompanied us almost continually and we enjoyed good views too of **Iberian Grey Shrike**. Throughout our stay there, the light was crystal clear enabling us to benefit from full zoom on the telescopes. An **Iberian Hare** was an added bonus.

After coffee north of Trujillo, we took the motorway to Arrocampo, a reservoir which provides cooling water for the Almaráz nuclear power station. We walked a short section of its vegetation-fringed edge, sometimes beside patches of rough pasture. One of the first birds we saw was a **Purple Swamphen** chomping on a shoot of lesser reed mace, the excellent light showing off its purple plumage outstandingly. As we stood, two **Great White Egret** were seen, as large as the **Grey Heron** which came up as the egrets flew individually too close to it. A **Squacco Heron** was also watched coming into land. Along the walk we also found a **Black-winged Kite** perched on a post. It flew and soared higher and higher overhead. **Cetti's Warblers**, **Zitting Cisticolas**, **Chiffchaffs** and **Crested Larks** were common and from the ramp to Hide Number Two, Martin picked up the calls of **Bearded Tit**. As we returned to the vehicle, a male **Little Bittern** was seen flying to cover.

We drove north of the village of Saucedilla, having views again of **Black-winged Kite**, this time hovering and best of all, the chance to watch a party of about four **Penduline Tit** feeding on the reed mace seed heads.

We stopped for lunch at a bar/restaurant near the motorway exit for Delietosa, half way back to Trujillo. On arrival at Trujillo, there was just time to pay a quick visit to the start of the Belén Plains, in the hope of finding Great Spotted Cuckoo. On that front we were unlucky, but we enjoyed a wonderful **Little Owl** that quite refused to be budged from its favourite perch.

As we were unloading the vehicle back at El Recuerdo, an obliging **Hawfinch** sat on the bare Judas Tree in front of Charles and Mary's room.

27th February 2012

We left at 08.20 and after dropping Patrick off at school in the main square of Trujillo, got onto the motorway for our return to the airport. There was a fleeting glimpse of a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoo** en route and near Almaráz a **Black-winged Kite** flew across the road. We reached Terminal 4 at 11.20, in good time for the 13.35 flight back to Heathrow.

Bird Species recorded

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|-------------------------------|---|
| 1) Little Grebe | Seen at Mohda Alta, Talaván and Arrocampo. |
| 2) Great Crested Grebe | Seen at Sierra Brava and Talaván reservoirs, |
| as well as Monfragüe. | |
| 3) Black-necked Grebe | One at Sierra Brava on 23 rd February. |

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| 4) Cormorant | Seen almost daily. |
| 5) Little Bittern | One at Arrocampo on 26 th February. |
| 6) Squacco Heron | One at Arrocampo on 26 th February. |
| 7) Cattle Egret | Seen almost daily. |
| 8) Little Egret | Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo. |
| 9) Great White Egret | Two at Arrocampo on 26 th February. |
| 10) Grey Heron | Seen almost daily. |
| 11) Black Stork | Two at Monfragüe on 24 th February. |
| 12) White Stork | Seen everyday. |
| 13) Wigeon | Present at Sierra Brava and Moheda Alta. |
| 14) Gadwall | Seen almost daily. |
| 15) Teal | Seen almost daily. |
| 16) Pintail | Present at Sierra Brava, at Moheda Alta
(several hundred) and a pair at Talaván. |
| 17) Mallard | Seen almost daily. |
| 18) Shoveler | Several thousand on Sierra Brava on 23 rd
February. |
| 19) Pochard | About thirty on Talaván on 25 th February. |
| 20) Black-shouldered Kite | Singles seen on drive from and back to Madrid
and one (perhaps two) at Arrocampo on 26 th February. |
| 21) Black Kite | One at Monfragüe on 24 th February. |
| 22) Red Kite | Seen daily. |
| 23) Egyptian Vulture | About five seen at Monfragüe on 24 th February
and one distantly at Talaván on 25 th February. |
| 24) Griffon Vulture | Seen almost daily. |
| 25) Black Vulture | Seen almost daily. |
| 26) Marsh Harrier | Seen on rice fields, on plains near Trujillo and
at Arrocampo. |
| 27) Hen Harrier | A ringtail at Moheda Alta on 23 rd , two males
and a ringtail on plains during 24 th and a male on journey back to Madrid
27 th February. |
| 28) Sparrowhawk | A pair at Monfragüe on 24 th February. |
| 29) Common Buzzard | Seen everyday. |
| 30) Spanish Imperial Eagle | Two seen at Monfragüe on 24 th February. |
| 31) Golden Eagle | A juvenile over River Almonte on 25 th
February. |
| 32) Bonelli's Eagle | One at Monfragüe on 24 th February. |
| 33) Lesser Kestrel | Seen on most days on plains as well as Bull
Ring, Trujillo. |
| 34) Common Kestrel | Seen almost daily. |
| 35) Merlin | One seen on plains of Zorita on 23 rd February |
| 36) Peregrine | A pair at Monfragüe on 24 th February. |
| 37) Red-legged Partridge | Seen almost daily. |
| 38) Water Rail | Two birds seen near Vegas Altas on 23 rd
February and heard at Arrocampo on 26 th February. |
| 39) Moorhen | Seen at Talaván and Arrocampo. |
| 40) Purple Swamphen | Several seen at Arrocampo on 26 th February. |
| 41) Coot | Seen at Sierra Brava, Talaván and
Arrocampo. |

- 42) **Common Crane** Seen daily with parties on migration and a total of about a thousand seen at various sites on rice fields on 23rd February.
- 43) **Little Bustard** A party of about 12 on Zorita plains and 28 west of Trujillo on 26th February.
- 44) **Great Bustard** A group of about 12 lekking males on Zorita plains with a further four birds nearby on 23rd, a total of 26 seen on 25th on Santa Marta road and a total of about 30 in flight west of Trujillo on 26th February.
- 45) **Black-winged Stilt** Single figures on rice fields on 23rd February.
- 46) **Avocet** Three at Moheda Alta on 23rd February.
- 47) **Stone Curlew** About six near Madrigalejo on 23rd February.
- 48) **Little Ringed Plover** Seen at Moheda Alta on 23rd February.
- 49) **Golden Plover** Seen almost daily.
- 50) **Lapwing** Seen every day.
- 51) **Ruff** Two at Moheda alta on 23rd February.
- 52) **Snipe** Good numbers on the rice fields and seen also at Talaván and Arrocampo.
- 53) **Black-tailed Godwit** A total of about twenty seen on rice fields on 23rd February.
- 54) **Spotted Redshank** One at Moheda Alta on 23rd February.
- 55) **Greenshank** One at Moheda Alta on 23rd February
- 56) **Green Sandpiper** Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
- 57) **Common Sandpiper** Singles at Moheda Alta and Arrocampo.
- 58) **Lesser Black-backed Gull** Seen on rice fields and on plains.
- 59) **Black-headed Gull** Seen on rice fields and on plains.
- 60) **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** About ten on Zorita plains on 23rd, two distantly near Santa Marta de Magasca on 25th and heard on plain son 26th February.
- 61) **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** About 30 seen west of Trujillo on 26th February.
- 62) **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon** Seen every day.
- 63) **Woodpigeon** Seen almost daily.
- 64) **Collared Dove** Seen daily.
- 65) **Great Spotted Cuckoo** Brief views on 25th and 27th February.
- 66) **Eagle Owl** Incubating bird seen at Monfragüe on 24th February.
- 67) **Little Owl** Seen almost daily on the plains.
- 68) **Kingfisher** Seen at Monfragüe, Talaván and Arrocampo.
- 69) **Hoopoe** Seen daily.
- 70) **Great Spotted Woodpecker** Heard at Monfragüe.
- 71) **Calandra Lark** Seen on each visit to the plains.
- 72) **Crested Lark** Seen daily.
- 73) **Thekla Lark** Seen at Monfragüe, Talaván and plains west of Trujillo.
- 74) **Woodlark** Seen at Moheda Alta.
- 75) **Skylark** Seen almost daily on plains.
- 76) **Crag Martin** Seen at Monfragüe, Trujillo and River Almonte.
- 77) **Swallow** Seen daily.

78) House Martin	Seen almost daily
79) Meadow Pipit	Seen on plains, rice fields and Arrocampo.
80) Water Pipit	About six seen on rice fields on 23 rd February.
81) Grey Wagtail	Singles at Monfragüe and River Almonte.
82) White Wagtail	Seen daily.
83) Wren	Singing in Monfragüe.
84) Robin	Seen daily.
85) Bluethroat	Three seen on rice fields on 23 rd February
including one "star" male.	
86) Black Redstart	Seen daily.
87) Stonechat	Seen daily.
88) Black Wheatear	Female in Monfragüe on 24 th February.
89) Blue Rock Thrush	Seen in Monfragüe.
90) Blackbird	Seen daily.
91) Song Thrush	Seen daily. Very common in wild olive groves
92) Cetti's Warbler	Recorded on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
93) Zitting Cisticola	Recorded on rice fields, Talaván and at
Arrocampo.	
94) Sardinian Warbler	Seen at Moheda Alta and Monfragüe.
95) Blackcap	Seen daily.
96) Chiffchaff	Abundant, seen daily.
97) Long-tailed Tit	Seen at Moheda Alta and Monfragüe.
98) Crested Tit	Seen briefly and heard at Monfragüe.
99) Blue Tit	Seen almost daily.
100) Great Tit	Seen almost daily.
101) Bearded Tit	Heard at Arrocampo on 26 th February.
102) Short-toed Treecreeper	Heard at Monfragüe.
103) Penduline Tit	Seen at Arrocampo on 26 th February.
104) Iberian Grey Shrike	Seen almost daily.
105) Jay	Seen at Monfragüe.
106) Azure-winged Magpie	Seen daily.
107) Magpie	Seen daily.
108) Jackdaw	Seen daily.
109) Raven	Seen daily.
110) Common Starling	Several in mixed starling flock on Zorita plains
on 23 rd February.	
111) Spotless Starling	Seen daily.
112) House Sparrow	Seen daily.
113) Spanish Sparrow	Seen almost daily.
114) Tree Sparrow	Seen at Moheda Alta on 23 rd February.
115) Rock Sparrow	Heard at Monfragüe on 24 th February.
116) Red Avadavat	Seen on rice fields on 23 rd February.
117) Chaffinch	Seen daily.
118) Serin	Seen daily.
119) Greenfinch	Heard at Monfragüe on 23 rd February.
120) Goldfinch	Seen daily.
121) Linnet	Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
122) Hawfinch	Seen at Monfragüe, River Almonte and in
garden of El Recuerdo.	
123) Rock Bunting	Two at Monfragüe on 24 th February.

124)	Reed Bunting	Seen on rice fields, Talaván and Arrocampo.
125)	Corn Bunting	Seen daily.

Mammals Recorded

Otter (Talaván 25th February)

Red Deer (Monfragüe 24th February)

Iberian Hare (Santa Marta de Magasca 25th February)

Rabbit (outside Trujillo 27th February)

Butterflies

Cleopatra

Clouded Yellow

Large Tortoiseshell

Western Dappled White

Small Copper

Small Heath

Red Admiral