

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Spring Holiday 22nd - 29th April 2012

Martin Kelsey

Participants

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Itinerary

22nd April: Pick-up at Madrid airport and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

23rd April: Monfragüe National Park

24th April: Plains south of Zorita, Moheda Alta and Guadalupe

25th April: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Talaván and Trujillo

26th April: Alange Reservoir and Mérida

27th April: Guadiloba and Valdesalor reservoir, Los Barruecos and Belén

28th April: Arrocampo reservoir

29th April: Valdecañas followed by return to Madrid airport for night flight.

The weather was varied, often overcast and with generally fresh windy conditions and plenty of rain during the second half of the week.

22nd April

The afternoon flight from London Gatwick arrived early and soon we were leaving the outskirts of Madrid, making a late but excellent lunch stop at the Esparteras bar along the A5 motorway. After that it was non-stop to Extremadura and arrival late afternoon at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

23rd April

The day started sunny but became overcast during the afternoon, with fresh winds all day. 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. 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** perched in a cork oak tree and her two chicks at their nest nearby. We also enjoyed excellent views of a **Spanish Imperial Eagle**.

We stopped just down the road to see a **Black Stork** at her nest, with a pair of **Egyptian Vultures** nearby. We had lunch amongst pines looking out over the Tiétar river, with another **Griffon Vulture** colony nearby.

We then took a short walk beside the Tajo Rover, watching **Alpine Swifts** and a **Bonelli's Eagle** passing low 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 **Peregrine**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart**.

24th April

It felt colder today, rather windy but generally sunny, with the wind abating by late afternoon. We visited the plains south of the town of Zorita 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 13 **Whimbrel**. We then headed onto the rice-growing area, although the fields were mainly ploughed (a few remaining as stubble) and mostly all dry. **Cetti's Warblers** were heard frequently and we saw several **Marsh Harriers**, as well as parties of **Red Avadavats** and a fine **Roller**.

After coffee at Obando, we stopped at a small pool and found a group of waders including **Lapwing**, **Little Stint**, and a **Collared Pratincole**. 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 after visiting the Crane Information Centre there.

We then drove up to Guadalupe to visit the Basilica of the famous Monastery. There followed coffee in the delightful small square of the town, where a massive stone font stands, used in 1496 for the baptism of people from South America who returned with Christopher Columbus. We then drove to a high viewpoint above the town where we had an excellent view of Guadalupe nestling in the tree-covered hills. We ended with a short walk beside the Ruercas river near Cañamero, where we saw **Rock Bunting**.

That evening we took a stroll along the lane at dusk and were rewarded with the lovely sound of the quite, gently hoot of **Long-eared Owls**, and watched one flying around twice. We also heard **Scops Owl** and **Barn Owl**.

25th April

It was a windy and overcast day. We explored the area to the west of Trujillo. Stopping first in open plains where we quickly 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. We stopped briefly north of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, where we had rather distant views of a **Golden Eagle**, before returning south to another area of plains where we watched **Montagu's Harriers**, **Short-toed Lark** and a delightful **Little Owl** peering out to us from a nestbox.

We stopped beside the Talaván reservoir where there were good numbers of Great Crested and Little Grebe and then stopped for lunch beside the River

Almonte where we had wonderful views of **Cirl Bunting** and **Egyptian Vultures**. We then returned to Trujillo to visit the medieval part of the town, starting in the Main Square, walking up to the Moorish castle and returning through the narrow streets between churches and old palaces, taking a stop to enter the magnificent church of Santa María.

26th April

It was a wet and overcast day, with fairly persistent rain throughout the morning.

We drove south-west to the capital of Extremadura: Mérida. Here we visited first the famous Roman Theatre and Amphitheatre, followed by a very rewarding visit to the excellent Museum of Roman Art. From there we visited the Temple of Diana and then the Roman Bridge, the longest such structure in the world. It spans the Guadiana river and from the bridge we had superb views of a pair of **Little Bittern** as well as **Penduline Tit** and a family of **Purple Swamphen**. After lunch of suckling pig and chorizo in an old restaurant in the city centre, we drove down to the Alange reservoir. Walking along the rather muddy path beside the reservoir we saw a fine male **Black Wheatear** as well as **Gull-billed Terns** over the water.

27th April

It was another wet and overcast day. We headed west towards Cáceres, making a brief visit first to the Guadiloba reservoir (where we saw **Great Spotted Cuckoo**) and then the Valdesalor reservoir before stopping beside the large White Storks' colony on platforms outside Malpartida de Cáceres. On the other side of the town is the National Natural Monument of Los Barruercos, one of the few places where the storks are nesting on top of granite boulders. We enjoyed a walk around the area, seeing a variety of birds including a smart **Grey Plover** in breeding plumage, a **Ringed Plover**, as well as **Booted Eagle**. After lunch in a bar at the edge of the town, we then spent the rest of the afternoon on the Belén plains east of Trujillo, where we saw **Great Bustard** and had some excellent views of **Bee-eaters**. Parties of **Lesser Kestrel** were feeding over the grasslands, making the most of a respite in the weather.

28th April

Despite another wet day, we had a very productive visit to the Arrocampo reservoir, where the reed and *Typha*-fringed banks provide excellent habitat for many species. Taking advantage of the hides to shelter from the rain, we saw a variety of heron species including **Purple** and **Grey Heron**, **Great Egret**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Spoonbill** and **Little Bittern**. A **Purple Heron** caused much interest on account of the size of reeds it was carrying to its nest, some over twice its length! **Savi's Warblers** sang almost continuously, a **Melodious Warbler** foraged nearby and a cheeky **Cetti's Warbler** perched right out in the open a number of times right in front of where we were sitting. Sightings were also had of **Black-winged Kite** and **Marsh Harrier**. Exploring farmland to the west, we had views of an Otter swimming in a small pool as well as seeing a

Spotted Flycatcher. The little bar in the town of Saucedilla proved an excellent refuge from the rain as well as a good spot for fried chorizo roll!

A brief stop was had in Trujillo to buy chorizos to take back home.

29th April

Another wet day and we left Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 9.30 to return to Madrid. We made a stop in a valley below the dam of the Valdecañas reservoir, where despite the poor weather a range of birds were in song: Golden Oriole, Nightingale, Blackcap and Wren amongst others. After an early lunch stop at Las Esparteras bar, we reached the airport shortly after 13.15.

Annotated List of Species Recorded

The holiday did not focus on maximising the number of species seen and time was also devoted to visiting cultural centres such as Trujillo, Guadalupe and Mérida. Notwithstanding this, plus inclement weather during much of the week, a good total of **127** species were recorded:

1. **Little Grebe** Seen on Talaván, los Barruercos and Arrocampo reservoirs.
2. **Great Crested Grebe** Seen at Talaván, Alange and los Barruercos.
3. **Great Cormorant** Seen on several days.
4. **Little Bittern** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
5. **Black-crowned Night Heron** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
6. **Cattle Egret** Seen almost everyday.
7. **Little Egret** Seen on several days.
8. **Great Egret** Seen at Arrocampo.
9. **Grey Heron** Seen almost everyday.
10. **Purple Heron** Seen at Arrocampo.
11. **Black Stork** Seen at Monfragüe.
12. **White Stork** Seen everyday.
13. **Spoonbill** Two seen at Arrocampo.
14. **Gadwall** Seen at Talaván and at Arrocampo.
15. **Mallard** Seen almost everyday.
16. **Black-winged Kite** Two near Arrocampo.
17. **Black Kite** Common, seen everyday.
18. **Red Kite** Seen on several days.
19. **Egyptian Vulture** Seen in Monfragüe and River Almonte.
20. **Griffon Vulture** Seen almost every day.
21. **Black Vulture** Seen almost every day.
22. **Short-toed Eagle** Seen on plains south of Zorita and River Almonte.
23. **Marsh Harrier** Seen at Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
24. **Montagu's Harrier** Seen on several days.
25. **Common Buzzard** Seen on several days.
26. **Spanish Imperial Eagle** Adult seen in Monfragüe.
27. **Golden Eagle** One north of Santa Marta de Magasca.
28. **Booted Eagle** Seen almost everyday.

29. **Bonelli's Eagle** One seen in Monfragüe.
30. **Lesser Kestrel** Seen almost every day.
31. **Common Kestrel** Seen almost every day.
32. **Peregrine** Seen in Monfragüe.
33. **Red-legged Partridge** Seen on several days.
34. **Quail** Heard on plains south of Zorita.
35. **Water Rail** Heard at Talaván.
36. **Moorhen** Seen on several days.
37. **Purple Swamphen** Seen in Mérida and Arrocampo.
38. **Common Coot** Seen in Mérida, Talaván and Arrocampo.
39. **Little Bustard** Seen on plains near Zorita.
40. **Great Bustard** Seen, including displaying males, on Zorita plains and near Santa Marta de Magasca and Belén.
41. **Black-winged Stilt** Seen most days.
42. **Collard Pratincole** One near Moheda Alta.
43. **Ringed Plover** One at Los Barruercos.
44. **Little Ringed Plover** Seen on several days.
45. **Grey Plover** One at Los Barruercos on 27th April.
46. **Lapwing** Five on pool at Moheda Alta on 24th April.
47. **Common Redshank** One on pool at Moheda Alta on 24th April.
48. **Common Sandpiper** Seen on several days.
49. **Whimbrel** 13 on Zorita plains on 24th April.
50. **Whiskered Tern** One seen from Roman bridge, Mérida on 18th April.
51. **Gull-billed Tern** Seen at Alange and Arrocampo.
52. **Black-headed Gull** Seen at Alange and Arrocampo.
53. **Lesser Black-backed Gull** Seen at Alange and Arrocampo.
54. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Zorita plains.
55. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
56. **Feral Pigeon** Seen everyday.
57. **Wood Pigeon** Seen almost everyday.
58. **Collared Dove** Seen everyday.
59. **Great Spotted Cuckoo** Seen on Guadiloba and on return to Madrid.
60. **Common Cuckoo** Heard and/or seen almost every day.
61. **Barn Owl** Heard near Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
62. **Scops Owl** Heard on several nights near Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
63. **Eagle Owl** Adult and two chicks seen at Monfragüe.
64. **Little Owl** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
65. **Long-eared Owl** Seen near El Recuerdo.
66. **Alpine Swift** Seen at Alange, Almonte and Monfragüe.
67. **Common Swift** Seen almost every day.
68. **Pallid Swift** Seen in Mérida and Trujillo.
69. **Kingfisher** Seen on several days.
70. **Bee-eater** Seen almost every day.
71. **Roller** Seen near Madrigalejo and Zorita plains.
72. **Hoopoe** Seen everyday.
73. **Calandra Lark** Seen on each visit to the plains.
74. **Short-toed Lark** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
75. **Crested Lark** Seen every day.
76. **Thekla Lark** Seen on several days.

77. **Sand Martin** Seen on several days.
78. **Crag Martin** Seen almost every day.
79. **Barn Swallow** Seen everyday.
80. **Red-rumped Swallow** Seen almost every day.
81. **House Martin** Seen every day.
82. **White Wagtail** Seen on several days.
83. **Wren** Seen or heard in Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
84. **Robin** Recorded in Monfragüe and Valdecañas
85. **Nightingale** Recorded almost every day.
86. **Black Redstart** Seen on Monfragüe and near Guadalupe.
87. **Stonechat** Seen every day.
88. **Northern Wheatear** Seen on each visit to the plains.
89. **Black Wheatear** A male seen at Alange.
90. **Blue Rock Thrush** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
91. **Blackbird** Seen everyday.
92. **Mistle Thrush** Seen at Monfragüe.
93. **Cetti's Warbler** Recorded most days.
94. **Zitting Cisticola** Recorded most days.
95. **Savi's Warbler** Several singing at Arrocampo.
96. **Sedge Warbler** Recorded at Mérida and at Arrocampo.
97. **Reed Warbler** Recorded along rivers in the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
98. **Great Reed Warbler** Recorded at Arrocampo.
99. **Subalpine Warbler** Seen in Monfragüe and near Guadalupe.
100. **Sardinian Warbler** Recorded on several days.
101. **Blackcap** Recorded at Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
102. **Spotted Flycatcher** One near Arrocampo.
103. **Long-tailed Tit** Seen on several days.
104. **Blue Tit** Seen on several days.
105. **Great Tit** Seen on several days.
106. **Short-toed Treecreeper** One calling at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
107. **Penduline Tit** Seen at Mérida.
108. **Golden Oriole** Heard near Valdecañas.
109. **Iberian Grey Shrike** Seen almost every day.
110. **Woodchat Shrike** Seen on almost every day.
111. **Jay** Seen on several days.
112. **Azure-winged Magpie** Seen daily.
113. **Magpie** Seen daily.
114. **Jackdaw** Seen almost daily.
115. **Raven** Seen almost every day.
116. **Spotless Starling** Seen every day.
117. **House Sparrow** Seen daily.
118. **Spanish Sparrow** Seen on several days, often in large flocks.
119. **Red Avadavat** Seen near Madrigalejo.
120. **Chaffinch** Seen on several days.
121. **Serin** Seen almost every day.
122. **Greenfinch** Seen in Mérida.
123. **Goldfinch** Seen on several days.
124. **Linnet** Seen in Monfragüe and Mérida.
125. **Cirl Bunting** Seen near River Almonte.

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| 126. | Rock Bunting | Seen near Guadalupe and Alange. |
| 127. | Corn Bunting | Seen every day. |