

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Spring Holiday 2nd – 9th April 2012

Martin Kelsey

Participants

Amy and Cherry

Itinerary

2nd April: Pick-up at Madrid airport and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

3rd April: Monfragüe National Park

4th April: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, and Trujillo bull ring.

5th April: Alange reservoir, Guadiana River and Roman Bridge Mérida.

6th April: Plains south of Zorita, Sierra Brava reservoir, Madrigalejo and Moheda Alta.

7th April: Heath land and cork oaks near Jaraicejo, Miravete Pass. Plains of Belén.

8th April: Plains south of Zorita, Trujillo, Almonte River.

9th April: Arrocampo reservoir followed by return to Madrid airport for afternoon flight.

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

2nd April

The flight from Hong Kong (via Doha) arrived about an hour late and after collecting luggage, we were assembled and ready to set off from the airport. The traffic was quite light and we made good progress on the ring-road and then the A5 motorway heading south-west from Madrid. It was not long before we had started to see the first **White Storks**, **Black Vultures** and **Black Kites** of the week.

We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 18.30, with time to settle-in, unpack and have an early dinner.

3rd April

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**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Mistle Thrush** and **Nuthatch**. 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 chick at their nest. Not to be outdone by that, a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** put on a superb show for us: we watched it perched, carrying food, mobbing a **Griffon Vulture**, calling and soaring – all in excellent light. Close by we also found **Subalpine Warbler**, **Rock Bunting**, **Serin**, **Black Redstart** and a **Western Bonelli's Warbler**, on passage, gave a few bursts of song.

Our next stop was at a viewpoint opposite a **Black Stork's** nest and we were fortunate enough to see the adult standing at the nest and apparently turning the eggs before settling down again to incubate. A pair of **Egyptian Vultures** was also seen there.

We stopped for our picnic at the Tajadilla viewpoint, from where we could see another **Griffon Vulture** colony and had fine views of passing **Black Vulture**, **Red** and **Black Kite**. In the trees above our picnic table, a **Hawfinch** was feeding.

After a stop for coffee, 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 juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** being mobbed by a **Peregrine**, a **Subalpine Warbler**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and excellent views of **Black Stork** in flight.

4th April

It was a rather cold day today, with some sunshine in the afternoon. We explored the area to the west of Trujillo. Stopping first in open plains where a group of **Little Bustard** were displaying: the males making short jumps into the air. **Corn Bunting** song surrounded us as did that of **Thekla** and **Crested Lark**. As we were watching, a party of **Great Bustards** flew overhead, impressive with their powerful wing beats. Along the road we had brief views of a **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 fine group of **Spanish Sparrows** posed on the roadside fence while we also had our first good views of **Iberian Grey Shrike**. 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, and after photographing **Red-legged Partridge**, we stopped for coffee in the village, with the delightful distraction of **House Martins** building their nests close by.

Afterwards we stopped to watch three **Montagu's Harriers** over a cereal field and then stopped beside the Magasca River for lunch. This stop was rewarded by views of a **Golden Eagle** and **Short-toed Eagle**, as well as **Crag Martins** much closer-by beside the bridge. We then drove south, getting excellent views of a **Common Cuckoo** on a telegraph wire, **Common** and **Lesser Kestrels** and **Little Owls** occupying boxes put up for Rollers. **Corn Buntings** were in abundance and we had excellent views of a pair of **Short-toed Lark**. Another

male **Montagu's Harrier** was also seen. We completed the day beside the Bull Ring in Trujillo, watching the arrival of **Lesser Kestrels** from their foraging trips over the plains. Back at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we took a short walk along the lane where we heard and saw **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** and a party of **Bee-eaters**.

After dinner, we had a memorable evening walk with excellent views of a calling **Scops Owl**.

5th April

Like yesterday the weather gradually improved during the day. We drove south-west, past the city of Mérida, south along the Guadiana river (where we stopped to photograph **White Storks**) 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 in the scrub were **Subalpine** and **Sardinian Warblers**, as well as migrating **Willow Warblers**. We found and had several good views of a male **Black Wheatear**, often perched on top of a rock, singing rather quietly. Following coffee we had lunch near by. We spent an hour or so walking along the gallery woodland of the Guadiana river, where **Cetti's Warblers** and a **Great Reed Warbler** sang and we found a passage **Pied Flycatcher**.

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 **Penduline Tit**, **Purple Swamphen** and excellent views of a male **Little Bittern**. **Common Chiffchaffs** and **Willow Warblers** were feeding together in the riverside trees.

After dinner, Amy and Cherry accompanied Claudia to watch the Easter Thursday processions through the streets of Trujillo.

6th April

It felt much colder today with a fresh north-westerly wind. We visited the plains south of the town of Zorita, enjoying excellent views of displaying **Great Bustards**, including on one occasion two males engaged in a physical fight, whilst two other males acted as spectators. Females in the vicinity however, appeared to take no notice! Close by was a party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, affording us much better views than previously. **Calandra Larks** were also seen well on the ground. 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**. Near the village of Vegas Altas we saw another group of four **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**.

We stopped at a small pool and found a group of waders including **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Little Stint**, **Ruff**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Greenshank** and **Dunlin**, alongside a **Collared Pratincole**. A fine **Booted Eagle** passed overhead. Following lunch we drove through another rice-growing area, where there were flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** and **Tree Sparrows**. Returning to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we enjoyed an excellent view of a **Roller** on a roadside wire, with a further two not that far away. A brief stop at Sierra Brava reservoir produced **Lesser Kestrel** and **Shoveler**.

After dinner we visited a local **Barn Owl** site, but although some movement was seen and the owl was calling, we did not get proper views of it.

7th April

The day started calm: 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 just coming into leaf 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 **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Nuthatch** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**, although with the exception of the **Nuthatch** which sang from an exposed branch, most of the sightings were brief. However in pinewoods just a few kilometres away, we enjoyed several prolonged views of **Short-toed Treecreeper** as well as **Crested Tit**, which seemed particularly common there. A **Rock Bunting** was also seen.

In the afternoon, we returned via the plains near Belén, seeing **Montagu's Harrier**, **Hoopoe** as well as the ubiquitous **Corn Buntings**.

8th April

Easter Sunday and there was a real change in the weather with sunshine and warmth all day. We elected to return to the plains south of Zorita to watch bustards again. It was an excellent choice. We found several groups of **Great Bustard** and **Little Bustard**, closer than we had seen before and also good views in flight. A female **Merlin** was a nice surprise, as were a total of five **Stone Curlews**, including two seen well at quite close quarters. Amongst the several **Montagu's Harriers** seen was a rare melanistic morph. As we returned to Trujillo, we came across a party of **Bee-eaters** on the roadside wires.

By late morning we had arrived in Trujillo which was witnessing the annual Chirivi festival in the main square. Thousands of people, many in traditional costume, were celebrating Easter Sunday, dancing to the music of a folk group. It was a colourful and happy scene. Above them the **White Storks** on their

nests and the **Pallid** and **Common Swifts** wheeling overhead seemed quite oblivious to it all.

We then had lunch and enjoyed an afternoon walk along the river Almonte, finding **Cirl Bunting**, a passage **Sedge Warbler**, as well as two **Black Stork** and **Booted Eagle**. Back in Trujillo afterwards for last-minute shopping and a chance to watch again the **Lesser Kestrels** at the Bull Ring, this time in glorious sunshine.

9th April

We set off early to give ourselves as much time as possible birding at the Arrocampo reservoir before our return to Madrid. The conditions were excellent with no wind and good light. **Savi's Warblers** sang on top of the reeds, and we had good views as well of **Squacco Heron** and **Little Bittern**, as well as **Purple Heron**, **Grey Heron** and **Marsh Harrier**. Several **Purple Swamphens** showed well and at last we got good views of a **Cetti's Warbler**. To the north of the reservoir, in farmland we saw two **Black-winged Kites** and had exceptionally good views of a party of **Bee-eaters** as well as a **Hoopoe**.

It was a wonderful way to end the holiday and packed-up and ready to go we continued on the motorway, reaching the airport in good time for the check-in at 13.25.

Annotated List of Species Recorded

Birds

The following 146 species were recorded:

1. **Little Grebe** Seen one pool near Trujillo.
2. **Great Crested Grebe** Seen at Alange, Sierra Brava and Arrocampo.
3. **Great Cormorant** Seen most days.
4. **Little Bittern** Seen from Roman Bridge, Mérida and at Arrocampo.
5. **Squacco Heron** Seen at Arrocampo.
6. **Cattle Egret** Seen almost everyday.
7. **Little Egret** Seen almost everyday.
8. **Great Egret** Seen in Monfragüe, Alange and Arrocampo.
9. **Grey Heron** Seen almost everyday.
10. **Purple Heron** Seen at Alange and Arrocampo.
11. **Black Stork** Seen at Monfragüe and over the Almonte river.
12. **White Stork** Seen everyday.
13. **Glossy Ibis** One near Arrocampo.
14. **Gadwall** Seen on Guadiana river and at Arrocampo.
15. **Mallard** Seen almost everyday.
16. **Shoveler** Small groups at Sierra Brava.
17. **Black-winged Kite** Two near Arrocampo.
18. **Black Kite** Common, seen everyday.
19. **Red Kite** Seen almost every day.
20. **Egyptian Vulture** Seen in Monfragüe and near Jaraicejo
21. **Griffon Vulture** Seen every day.
22. **Black Vulture** Seen almost every day.
23. **Short-toed Eagle** Seen almost every day.
24. **Marsh Harrier** Seen at Arrocampo, the Zorita steppes and on the rice fields.
25. **Montagu's Harrier** Seen almost every day. A melanistic bird seen near Zorita on 8th April.
26. **Sparrowhawk** One in Monfragüe.
27. **Common Buzzard** Seen almost everyday.
28. **Spanish Imperial Eagle** Two adults and an immature seen in Monfragüe.
29. **Golden Eagle** One over Magasca River on 4th April.
30. **Booted Eagle** Seen almost everyday.
31. **Bonelli's Eagle** One seen at Alange.
32. **Lesser Kestrel** Seen almost every day.
33. **Common Kestrel** Seen almost every day.
34. **Merlin** One female near Zorita on 8th April.
35. **Peregrine Falcon** One seen at Monfragüe.
36. **Red-legged Partridge** Seen almost every day.
37. **Quail** Heard on plains near Zorita on 8th April.
38. **Moorhen** Seen on several days.
39. **Purple Swamphen** Seen in Mérida and Arrocampo.
40. **Common Coot** Seen in Mérida and Arrocampo.

- 41. Little Bustard** About 20 seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and a similar number in total on Zorita plains.
- 42. Great Bustard** Seen, including displaying males, on Zorita plains and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
- 43. Black-winged Stilt** Seen most days.
- 44. Stone Curlew** Five on Zorita plains on 8th April.
- 45. Collared Pratincole** One at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 46. Little Ringed Plover** Seen on rice fields and on Almonte river.
- 47. Lapwing** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 4th April and three on pool at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 48. Dunlin** One in breeding plumage at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 49. Little Stint** About six at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 50. Ruff** About five at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 51. Black-tailed Godwit** One at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 52. Common Redshank** Two at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 53. Spotted Redshank** At least two at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 54. Greenshank** About five at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 55. Common Sandpiper** One at Moheda Alta on 6th April.
- 56. Gull-billed Tern** Several seen at Alange on 5th April.
- 57. Black-headed Gull** Seen on several days.
- 58. Lesser Black-backed Gull** Seen on several days.
- 59. Black-bellied Sandgrouse** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Zorita plains and near Vegas Altas.
- 60. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** 25-30 present on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
- 61. Feral Pigeon** Seen everyday.
- 62. Wood Pigeon** Seen everyday.
- 63. Collared Dove** Seen everyday.
- 64. Great Spotted Cuckoo** Seen briefly on two occasions.
- 65. Common Cuckoo** Heard at Monfragüe and seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and at Jaraicejo
- 66. Barn Owl** Heard near Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
- 67. Scops Owl** Heard every night and seen on 4th April close to El Recuerdo.
- 68. Eagle Owl** Seen in Monfragüe on 3rd April.
- 69. Little Owl** Seen on several days.
- 70. Alpine Swift** Seen at Alange.
- 71. Common Swift** Seen at Trujillo and Arrocampo.
- 72. Pallid Swift** Seen in Trujillo.
- 73. Kingfisher** Seen on several days.
- 74. Bee-eater** Seen almost every day.
- 75. Roller** Two or three seen near Madrigalejo on 6th April.
- 76. Hoopoe** Seen everyday.
- 77. Great Spotted Woodpecker** Seen in Monfragüe
- 78. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** One seen near El Recuerdo on 4th April and heard at Jaraicejo.
- 79. Calandra Lark** Seen on each visit to the plains.
- 80. Short-toed Lark** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Zorita plains.
- 81. Crested Lark** Seen every day.

82. **Thekla Lark** Seen on several days.
83. **Woodlark** Seen at Miravete Pass.
84. **Sand Martin** Seen at Guadiana River near Mérida and at Moheda Alta.
85. **Crag Martin** Seen almost every day.
86. **Barn Swallow** Seen everyday.
87. **Red-rumped Swallow** Seen almost every day.
88. **House Martin** Seen every day.
89. **Meadow Pipit** Seen on several days.
90. **White Wagtail** Seen almost everyday.
91. **Wren** Seen or heard most days.
92. **Robin** Recorded in Monfragüe and Alange.
93. **Nightingale** Heard every day.
94. **Black Redstart** Seen on several days.
95. **Stonechat** Seen almost every day.
96. **Northern Wheatear** Seen on very visit to the plains.
97. **Black Wheatear** A male seen at Alange.
98. **Blue Rock Thrush** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
99. **Blackbird** Seen everyday.
100. **Song Thrush** Seen at Monfragüe on 3rd April.
101. **Mistle Thrush** Seen at Monfragüe and singing at Jaraicejo.
102. **Cetti's Warbler** Recorded most days.
103. **Zitting Cisticola** Recorded most days.
104. **Savi's Warbler** Several singing at Arrocampo.
105. **Sedge Warbler** Recorded at Alange, on the River Almonte and
at Arrocampo.
106. **Reed Warbler** Recorded along rivers in the rice fields and at
Arrocampo.
107. **Great Reed Warbler** One singing near Guadiana river near
Mérida.
108. **Dartford Warbler** Two or three seen at Jaraicejo.
109. **Spectacled Warbler** One seen at Jaraicejo on 7th April.
110. **Subalpine Warbler** Seen in Monfragüe and at Alange.
111. **Sardinian Warbler** Recorded almost everyday.
112. **Western Orphean Warbler** One singing at Jaraicejo on 7th
April.
113. **Blackcap** Seen at Monfragüe, along Magasca river and near
Mérida.
114. **Western Bonelli's Warbler** One singing at Monfragüe on 3rd
April.
115. **Common Chiffchaff** Seen on several days.
116. **Willow Warbler** Seen near Mérida and at Jaraicejo.
117. **Pied Flycatcher** One near Mérida on 5th April.
118. **Long-tailed Tit** Seen on several days.
119. **Crested Tit** Several at Miravete Pass.
120. **Blue Tit** Seen every day.
121. **Great Tit** Seen almost every day.
122. **Nuthatch** Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
123. **Short-toed Treecreeper** Recorded at Jaraicejo and Miravete.
124. **Penduline Tit** Two seen at Mérida.
125. **Iberian Grey Shrike** Seen almost every day.

126. **Woodchat Shrike** Seen on almost every day.
127. **Jay** Recorded at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
128. **Azure-winged Magpie** Seen daily.
129. **Magpie** Seen daily.
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. **Red Avadavat** Seen near Madrigalejo.
138. **Chaffinch** Seen almost every day.
139. **Serin** Seen every day.
140. **Greenfinch** Seen in Monfragüe, Mérida and on rice fields.
141. **Goldfinch** Seen every day.
142. **Linnet** Seen most days.
143. **Hawfinch** Seen in Monfragüe and at Magasca river
144. **Cirl Bunting** One beside River Almonte.
145. **Rock Bunting** Seen in Monfragüe and Miravete.
146. **Corn Bunting** Seen every day.