

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

Holiday Report for Sandra and Caroline

22nd June to 29th June 2013

Itinerary

22nd June 2013: Transfer from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, near Trujillo, Extremadura.

23rd June 2013: Plains south of Zorita, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Moheda Alta, and Sierra Brava reservoir.

24th June 2013: Monfragüe National Park.

25th June 2013: Villuercas Mountains and Guadalupe.

26th June 2013: Arrocampo Reservoir, Valdecañas dam and Trujillo.

27th June 2013: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Talaván Reservoir and Malpartida de Cáceres

28th June 2013: Monfragüe National Park and Trujillo.

29th June 2013: Return to Madrid.

22nd June 2013

Martin met Sandra and Caro at Terminal 1 at Barajas airport, Madrid shortly after 15.00 and we headed out of Madrid on a hot, sunny Saturday afternoon, crossing the dry open plains of La Mancha and entering the more wooded Extremadura, with the impressive Gredos mountains as a backdrop to the north, with still a few pockets of snow showing on the southern slopes. From about 100 kms from Madrid we started to see **White Stork** and the occasional **Black Kite**. We stopped for coffee about half-way in the journey, reaching Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 18.30.

23rd June 2013

A hot day was forecast so we focused on getting to the nearest plains to the south of the house before the heat shimmer had made viewing difficult. We made a single stop at the edge of the plains, indeed we did not have to travel further, because it worked out so productive. Within minutes we had found a male **Great Bustard** at the edge of a ploughed section of field, as well as an enchanting **Little Owl**. **Black Kites** were feeding on grasshoppers on the road, whilst **Lesser Kestrels** hovered above the grasslands, searching for the same prey. A **Crested Lark** provided very obliging views nearby. From there we headed to an area of rice fields known as Moheda Alta. Here we walked beside a small pool which held **Kingfisher** and **Mallard**. **White Storks** foraged in the rice fields adjacent, whilst a flock of 200 **Lapwing** flew up, as did three **Green Sandpipers**. From the embankment we found two over-summering **Common Crane**. We took a track to get a closer view, seeing **Woodchat Shrike** nearby. Following coffee we had a picnic lunch beside the River Gargaligas. As well as a stork's nest with four nearly fledged young, we had superb views of a male **Little Bittern**, as well as **Great Reed Warblers**.

We spent the afternoon exploring rice fields, having good views of Bee-eaters, a very close **Roller**, as well as **Collared Pratincole** and smaller birds like **Zitting Cisticola**. We completed the afternoon with a stop at the Sierra Brava reservoir, where as well as **Great Crested Grebe**, we saw three **Whiskered Tern** and a more distant flock of **Gull-billed Tern**.

24th June 2013

Today, with another hot sunny day in prospect, we headed north through the vast expanse of *dehesa* holm oak wood pasture to the Monfragüe National Park. We drove through the park to stop at the Portilla del Tíetar viewpoint. Here the Tíetar river cuts through ancient sandstone quartzites, creating a narrow gorge with a rocky cliff set beside wooded hillsides. It was just minutes until we caught sight of one of our hoped-for species: a **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, soaring in the blue sky, showing its trademark white leading edge to the wing brilliantly. Another soon joined it. In the sky also were all three species of vulture: **Griffon**, **Black** and **Egyptian**, and **Black Stork**. However, one of the most memorable moments was the prolonged view of three **Otters** as they swam, played and ate fish along the water's edge opposite us. After coffee nearby we back-tracked through the park, with a stop in a belt of pine woods, where we watched a **Red Deer** hind, and lunched opposite another breeding area for **Griffon Vultures**, frequented also by **Ravens**. Nearby there was a female **Black-eared Wheatear** perching obligingly on a fence post. In the heat of the afternoon we sought shade on a riverside walk beside the Tajo, a cooler moister place where **Robins** and **Blackbirds** were present, as well as the large **Two-tailed Pasha** butterfly. We completed our visit at the Salto del Gitano viewpoint, perhaps the most impressive of all scenically where as well as may breeding pairs of **Griffon Vulture** we saw two nests of **Black Storks**, one with three chicks already exercising their wings and the other with two much smaller young.

25th June 2013

With again temperatures expected in the high 30s, we opted to seek fresher conditions in the highest points of the Villuercas Mountains, lying to the east of Trujillo. These mountains represent one of the best examples of Appalachian relief in Europe and have been declared a Geological Park. We spent the first part of the morning on the ridges above the town of Cañamero, enjoying a beautiful walk through pine woods and Pyrenean oak. Butterflies patrolled the shady path and we had excellent views of **Nuthatch** and **Crested Tit**, with briefer views of a singing **Western Bonelli's Warbler**. A pair of **Egyptian Vultures** circled overhead. After coffee in Cañamero, we drove past Guadalupe and rose to the summit of the Villuercas mountains, at 1,600 metres above sea-level. The views were good, but the heat rising from the plains did create a haze which prevented us from seeing as far as we had expected. However, we could appreciate the beauty of the Villuercas Mountains and watched **Red-billed Chough** and **Black Redstart** at the summit, as well as a singularly out of place **Montagu's Harrier** which glided past.

We had lunch in the shade of Pyrenean oaks and then took a look at the interesting Pozo de Nieve (a medieval ice store), one of the best examples of its kind in existence. After that we descended to Guadalupe where Sandra and Caro took the opportunity of a guided tour of the famous monastery.

26th June 2013

Another change of habitat and landscape with the morning spent at the Arrocampo reservoir, which was made to provide cooling water for the Almaráz nuclear power station. Thanks to constant water levels and slightly above average water temperatures it has the best reed beds in the province and is home to thriving colonies of herons and egrets. We enjoyed over two hours sitting in the shelter of a hide and watching the almost constant comings and goings of **Purple Herons**, bringing food to their young, most of which were almost on the point of being able to fly. It was a wonderful way to spend the morning, there was always something to see. As well as the **Purple Herons**, we watched **Black-crowned Night Herons**, **Little** and **Cattle Egrets**, **Purple Swamphens**, **Little Grebes** and **Great Crested Grebes**. A group of **Gadwall** up-ended to feed in the pool before us, whilst in the sky above **Red** and **Black Kites** gave us superb views.

After coffee, we then moved to a deep wooded valley where we had lunch. We obtained several brief views of **Golden Oriole** and even briefer ones of **Hawfinch**. A **Short-toed Eagle** was seen as well as several **Griffon Vultures**.

We then returned to visit Trujillo, trying to keep in the shady side of the narrow streets leading up through the medieval area to the impressive Moorish Castle. The views from the top were magnificent, but the heat of the afternoon defeated us and we descended to enjoy ice-creams in the main square, as packs of **Common** and **Pallid Swifts**, **White Storks** and **Lesser Kestrels** offered us a great distraction.

27th June 2013

Today we set off a bit earlier to spend the morning on the plains between Trujillo and Cáceres. The earlier start meant that we could take advantage of a little longer of the cooler morning, before the heat of the day set in. Out on the plains we found a juvenile **Peregrine** enjoying its breakfast, standing on a fence post eating a small bird. Nearby we had excellent views of **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Woodchat Shrike**, juveniles of the latter species being particularly abundant. Lark song was subdued, but a **Thekla Lark** sang above us, whilst **Crested Larks** were on nearby fences. We came across two male **Great Bustards** and had good views of two **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** flying over. A fine male **Montagu's Harrier** quartered the parched pastures and **Bee-eaters** were quite common along the fences. Everywhere **White Storks** were striding through the grasses looking for prey.

We stopped at respectively the Magasca and Almonte Rivers, getting views of **Kingfishers** at the former and a **Short-toed Eagle** at the latter.

At the reservoir of Talaván we had lunch, appreciating the shelter of the hide to escape the heat. An adult **Golden Eagle** was found also escaping the midday sun, standing on the ground in the shade of a giant eucalyptus tree. On the reservoir there were family parties of **Great Crested Grebe**, about five **Grey Heron** and a male **Pochard** amongst the parties of **Mallard** and **Gadwall**.

We completed the afternoon at the famous **White Storks'** colony on posts near Malpartida de Cáceres. As with the enjoyable period looking at the colony of Purple Herons, it was fascinating to see the adults coming in to bring food to the chicks and also to note the quite large range of ages of the nestlings, some of which were already flying whilst others still carried quite a bit of downy feathers.

28th June 2013

We returned in the morning to Monfragüe National Park and spent most of the morning watching from the Salto de Gitano viewpoint. Magnificent views of vultures, good views of **Rock Bunting** and **Blue Rock Thrush**, but pride of place were the **Black Storks**. It was a pleasure to observe the chicks and the arrival of an adult to bring in food for them.

After coffee, we moved on to the centre of the park, seeing a fine male **Black-eared Wheatear** catching insects on the road and a young **Red Deer** stag. We had lunch in the welcome shade of pine trees, looking down onto the Tiétar river.

Most of the afternoon was spent making a slow return to Trujillo, exploring small roads across the plains in what turned-out to be a fruitless attempt to find a perched Hoopoe. It was the quiet time of the day on a hot summer afternoon, but we were rewarded by **Short-toed Eagle** and **Thekla Lark**. After some shopping in Trujillo, we returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

29th June 2013

Following farewells at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we set off at by 09.30 for the return to Madrid. True to form, as leading protagonists of the week, **White Storks** were well in evidence at the nests and feeding in the fields, all the way to within a hundred or so kilometres from Madrid. We also saw a **Black Stork** flying high over the motorway. We reached the airport in good time for the check-in for the flight back to London.

Annotated List

The week's holiday coincided with the arrival of the summer heat wave. This, together with the completion of breeding of many species, especially small birds, meant that the birdwatching was far more challenging than it would be earlier in spring. Despite that a total of 116 species were recorded, with especially memorable experiences watching the breeding storks and herons.

1. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Arrocampo and on a pond near Trujillo.

2. **Great Crested Grebe:** Present on the larger water bodies such as Sierra Brava, Talaván and Arrocampo.
3. **Great Cormorant:** Recorded in Monfragüe and Arrocampo.
4. **Little Bittern:** A male on River Gargaligas on 23rd June.
5. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo.
6. **Cattle Egret:** Seen most days.
7. **Little Egret:** Seen at Arrocampo.
8. **Grey Heron:** Seen at Monfragüe, Arrocampo, Talaván and near Trujillo.
9. **Purple Heron:** One at Moheda Alta on 23rd June and a colony at Arrocampo.
10. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe and on return to Madrid.
11. **White Stork:** Seen everyday, with many nests have young close to fledging.
12. **Gadwall:** Seen at Arrocampo and Talaván.
13. **Mallard:** Seen on several days.
14. **Common Pochard:** One male at Talaván on 27th June.
15. **Black Kite:** Common and seen daily.
16. **Red Kite:** Seen at Arrocampo and on return to Madrid.
17. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen at Monfragüe and the Villuercas mountains.
18. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
19. **Black Vulture:** Seen in Monfragüe and over Arrocampo.
20. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen in Monfragüe, over River Almonte, Valdecañas and near Trujillo.
21. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on rice fields, Arrocampo and Talavan.
22. **Montagu's Harrier:** A female over Pico de Villuercas on 25th June and a male west of Trujillo on 27th June.
23. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
24. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** A pair in Monfragüe National Park on 24th June.
25. **Golden Eagle:** An adult at Talaván.
26. **Booted Eagle:** Seen on several days.
27. **Bonelli's Eagle:** One seen briefly over River Almonte in 24th June.
28. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen daily.
29. **Common Kestrel:** One at Valdecañas.
30. **Peregrine Falcon:** One west of Trujillo on 27th June and seen in Monfragüe on 28th June.
31. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen at Moheda Alta and on plains.
32. **Quail:** One at Moheda Alta.
33. **Water Rail:** Calling at Talaván.
34. **Moorhen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
35. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
36. **Common Coot:** Seen at Arrocampo and Talaván.
37. **Common Crane:** Two over-summering birds seen at Moheda Alta on 23rd June.
38. **Great Bustard:** One on plains south of Zorita on 23rd June and two west of Trujillo on 27th June.
39. **Black-winged Stilt:** About 40 on rice fields and two seen at Arrocampo.
40. **Collared Pratincole:** Several seen on rice fields.
41. **Little Ringed Plover:** One at Talaván.

42. **Northern Lapwing:** About 200 at Moheda Alta on 23rd June and four at Arrocampo on 26th June.
43. **Green Sandpiper:** Four seen on rice fields on 23rd June and one at Talaván.
44. **Whiskered Tern:** Three at Sierra Brava reservoir on 23rd June.
45. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen at Sierra Brava and at Arrocampo.
46. **Black-headed Gull:** One on rice fields.
47. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Two west of Trujillo on 27th June.
48. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
49. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
50. **Collared Dove:** seen daily.
51. **Turtle Dove:** Calling in Monfragüe.
52. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains south of Zorita and west of Trujillo.
53. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Monfragüe.
54. **Common Swift:** Seen almost daily.
55. **Pallid Swift:** Seen in Trujillo.
56. **Kingfisher:** Seen at Moheda Alta, Arrocampo and Magasca River.
57. **Bee-eater:** Seen daily.
58. **Roller:** Seen at rice fields on 23rd June.
59. **Hoopoe:** Seen (in flight) on four days.
60. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Recorded in Villuercas Mounatins and Valdecañas.
61. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
62. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost every day.
63. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and in Monfragüe.
64. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
65. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
66. **Barn Swallow:** Seen every day.
67. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen every day.
68. **House Martin:** Seen every day.
69. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen in Monfragüe on 24th June.
70. **White Wagtail:** Seen most days.
71. **Wren:** Recorded on several days.
72. **Robin:** Seen in Monfragüe on 24th June.
73. **Nightingale:** Seen almost everyday in garden.
74. **Black Redstart:** Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
75. **Stonechat:** Seen on several days.
76. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen on both visits to Monfragüe.
77. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe.
78. **Blackbird:** Seen most days.
79. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded in rice fields.
80. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen most days.
81. **Reed Warbler:** Recorded in rice fields and Arrocampo.
82. **Great Reed Warbler:** Seen on rice fields, Arrocampo and Talaván.
83. **Subalpine Warbler:** seen in Monfragüe.
84. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen on several days.
85. **Blackcap:** Recorded on several days.
86. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** Seen near Cañamero on 25th June.
87. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen in Monfragüe.
88. **Crested Tit:** Seen near Cañamero on 25th June.

89. **Blue Tit:** Seen on several days.
90. **Great Tit:** Seen on several days.
91. **Nuthatch:** Seen near Cañamero on 25th June.
92. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded in Monfragüe and Villuercas.
93. **Golden Oriole:** Seen in Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
94. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen in rice fields and plains west of Trujillo.
95. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen on several days.
96. **Jay:** Seen in Villuercas and Valdecañas.
97. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
98. **Magpie:** Seen almost daily.
99. **Red-billed Chough:** A party on Pico de Villuercas.
100. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
101. **Raven:** Seen on plains and in Monfragüe.
102. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
103. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
104. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen at Talaván and on plains.
105. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen in rice fields.
106. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen in Monfragüe in cork oak woodland.
107. **Common Waxbill:** Seen in rice fields.
108. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
109. **Serin:** Seen in Monfragüe.
110. **Greenfinch:** Seen almost daily.
111. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
112. **Linnet:** Seen in Monfragüe.
113. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Valdecañas and Monfragüe.
114. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
115. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
116. **Corn Bunting:** Seen on plains.