

## Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

### REPORT ON EARLY SUMMER HOLIDAY FOR ANDY, CAROLE, DAVE AND JANN

Martin Kelsey

#### Itinerary (29<sup>th</sup> May to 4<sup>th</sup> June 2013)

**29<sup>th</sup> May 2013:** Transfer from Lisbon to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

**30<sup>th</sup> May 2013:** Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, Almonte River and Talaván reservoir.

**31<sup>st</sup> May 2013:** Monfragüe National Park

**1<sup>st</sup> June 2013:** Campo Lugar plains, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Sierra Brava reservoir

**2<sup>nd</sup> June 2013:** Jaraicejo and Miravete Pass, Villuercas mountains, Trujillo.

**3rd June 2013:** Arrocampo reservoir, Valdecañas Dam and Almonte River.

**4th May 2013:** Villafranca de los Barros, Alange and return to Lisbon.

#### Trip Report

##### 29<sup>th</sup> May 2013

Martin with his sister Katrina met the group on schedule at midday at their hotel in downtown Lisbon. The journey through to Extremadura was smooth, with the weather steadily improving as we entered Spain. We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo late afternoon.

##### 30<sup>th</sup> May 2013

The day was spent exploring the plains and river valleys between Trujillo and the provincial capital Cáceres to the west. The first area visited was east of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca to an area of mixed farming open country, now looking dry as summer approached. Here we obtained views of about 40 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, as well as a single **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and three **Great Bustard**. The sheer abundance of larks (**Calandra**, **Thekla** and **Crested**) was superb. Following coffee beside the village, we then drove towards Cáceres, crossing the deep Tamuja valley and then an area of open country where **Rollers** and **Little Owls** were occupying nest boxes sited on

electricity posts. Our next stop was the Almonte River valley where we walked beside a ravine. A **Melodious Warbler** sang from wild olives and we obtained our first sightings of the week of **Black Wheatear**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Alpine Swifts**. We had lunch beside the Talaván reservoir, where we had excellent views of two **Golden Eagles**, as well as two **Black Tern** and singing **Great Reed Warblers**. We returned across the plains to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with a stop again at higher reaches of the Almonte River.

### 31<sup>st</sup> May 2013

The whole day was dedicated to the Monfragüe National Park, one of the most important sites in the world for nesting raptors. We started at the Portilla del Tiétar where the Tiétar River cuts through quartzite and ancient sandstones creating a gorge, with nesting **Griffon Vultures** on the rock face. A pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagle** nest close-by and we enjoyed good views of this spectacular bird. Four of the rare **White-rumped Swifts** were also seen against the cliff face, where **Red-rumped Swallows** were also nesting (the swift occupies their old nests). Closer at hand we watched **Rock Bunting**. In a nearby area of cork oaks we found a pair of **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** and watched a **Western Orphean Warbler** collecting nest material from the ground. **Rock Sparrows** and **Short-toed Treecreepers** were also present, whilst above our heads a pair of **Hobby** were hunting insects.

During the day we visited other viewpoints, getting sightings of **Egyptian Vulture** and **Black Vulture**, and at the impressive Salto del Gitano, where the Tajo River leaves the park, we could look down on two **Black Stork** nests.

### 1<sup>st</sup> June 2013

A return to the open country today, with a start on open plains south of Zorita, before moving further south into the rice fields near Madrigalejo.

The initial stop was highly productive with **Little Owl**, **Great Bustard**, **Stone Curlew**, **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and **Short-toed Lark** all seen from the same spot! **Lesser Kestrels** hunted in groups over the fields, whilst flocks of **Ravens** and **White Storks** were collecting grasshoppers from ground. Just a little further up the road, at our next stop, we obtained good views of a male **Little Bustard**, one of the most sought-after birds of the week because it is very difficult to find at this time of the year, with the ground vegetation being so high.

We then moved down to the rice-growing area and came across a group of migrating **Common Redshank**, whilst nearby, in a stony maize field, a colony of **Collared Pratincoles** was present. Following coffee, we explored an area of arable land, passing beside the Sierra Brava reservoir, where the hoped-for Black-eared Wheatear was not showing. We then stopped for lunch beside the Rio Gargaligas where as we ate we could watch **Great Reed Warblers**, **Common Waxbills** and a **Little Bittern**. We made our way back to Sierra Brava reservoir to try again for Black-eared Wheatear. On arrival there, we noticed a bird swimming in a bay, not far from some anglers on the shore-line. At first glance it looked like a Common Coot, but once it had turned to face us, it

was clear that the bill had orange-yellow. We were looking at a male scoter! The bird was very tired and spent most of the time sleeping not far from the bank. This enabled us to approach and Dave managed to get a set of excellent photos. These plus the close observation enabled us to confirm that it was a first-summer male **Common Scoter**, only the third ever record for Extremadura and the first time one had been found in the summer.

Excited by our find, we left Sierra Brava and just minutes afterwards found a pair of **Black-eared Wheatears** close to the road. That species had been a lucky charm for us.

At dusk we walked close to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and were fortunate to see a pair of **Scops Owls**, a **Long-eared Owl** in flight and brief views of **Red-necked Nightjar**.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2013

We switched today for a focus on smaller birds and started on the heath lands near the town of Jaraicejo. Along a dirt track we walked and enjoyed the sight of family parties of **Dartford Warblers** coming out to hop on the ground in front of us. **Spectacled Warbler** took more finding, but eventually we were rewarded with a prolonged view of a singing male. At our next stop at the Miravete Pass, where there was a superb view north to the Gredos Mountains and south towards Trujillo, we obtained good views of both **Sardinian** and **Subalpine Warblers**. Following coffee, we headed east to the Villuercas Mountains where we made our first stop beside the Almonte River. Here there was a particularly bright-looking **Subalpine Warbler**, whilst against the backdrop of the cliffs there we saw two **White-rumped Swifts**. We spent some time exploring a circular route through the mountains, stopping in belts of woodland and enjoying quite spectacular scenery. We ended the day with a visit to the main square of Trujillo where we watched **Common** and **Pallid Swifts**, **Lesser Kestrels** and **White Storks**.

That evening we walked again close to the village and this time had excellent views of a pair of **Red-necked Nightjar**.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2013

Today we travelled north-east to visit the Arrocampo Reservoir, specially created to provide cooling water for the Almaráz nuclear power station and thanks to its steady water levels and above-average water temperature, boasts a wide fringe of emergent vegetation such as lesser reed mace and reeds, an important breeding area for many water birds and we saw species such as **Purple Heron**, **Little Bittern**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Purple Swamphen**, family parties of **Penduline Tits**, **Savi's** and **Great Reed Warblers**. We then had lunch in a small valley of mixed woodland near the Valdecañas dam. Here we were rewarded by sightings of **Golden Oriole**, including perched birds, **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and **Egyptian Vulture**. We returned to Trujillo via a stop at the Almonte Rover where we enjoyed excellent views of a singing male **Cirl Bunting**.

**4<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

Our final day and we travelled south-west, passing Mérida (Extremadura's capital) to reach the Tierra de Barros, a vast area of olive and vine cultivation. The target here was the **Rufous Bush Robin** and we initially got a brief glimpse of one flying up into a tree, but subsequently had prolonged views of a singing male. The area also produced a singing **Black-eared Wheatear**. Following coffee, we visited the dam of the Alange reservoir, home of Extremadura's largest **Alpine Swift** colony. We had lunch in the car-park, beside the dam and enjoyed the wonderful view of a party of three or four **Black Wheatears** flycatching from the rock face. Just as we were leaving we also had brief views of a pair of displaying **Bonelli's Eagles**. From there we travelled up to Mérida, stopping to admire a large colony of **White Stork**. At Mérida, we paused to admire the Roman Bridge, spanning the Guadiana River and the longest extant bridge of that era in the world. From there it was then the final leg of the journey, back to Lisbon airport, which we reached more or less on schedule at 17.10 (local time). That draw us to the end of a very productive birding holiday.

### **Annotated list of birds seen**

On a six-day break, a good total of 132 species recorded.

1. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Talaván and Arrocampo reservoirs.
2. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Talaván, Sierra Brava and Arrocampo reservoirs.
3. **Great Cormorant**: Seen at Arrocampo.
4. **Little Bittern**: Seen on River Gargaligas and Arrocampo.
5. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
6. **Cattle Egret**: Seen almost daily.
7. **Little Egret**: Seen almost daily.
8. **Great Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo.
9. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
10. **Purple Heron**: Good numbers at Arrocampo and Mérida.
11. **Black Stork**: Seen over River Almonte, Monfragüe National Park and Jaraicejo.
12. **White Stork**: Seen daily.
13. **Gadwall**: Seen at Arrocampo reservoir.
14. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
15. **Common Scoter**: A first-summer male at Sierra Brava on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
16. **Black Kite**: Seen daily.
17. **Red Kite**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Monfragüe.
18. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
19. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen daily.
20. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
21. **Short-toed Eagle**: Seen almost daily.
22. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen near Campo Lugar, the rice fields and Arrocampo.
23. **Montagu's Harrier**: One male seen on plains south of Monroy 30<sup>th</sup> May.
24. **Sparrowhawk**: One seen Pago de San Clemente.
25. **Common Buzzard**: Seen daily.

26. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** A pair in Monfragüe National Park on 31<sup>st</sup> May and one over Valdecañas dam on 3<sup>rd</sup> June.
27. **Golden Eagle:** A pair at Talaván on 30<sup>th</sup> May.
28. **Booted Eagle:** Seen daily.
29. **Bonelli's Eagle:** A pair at Alange on 4<sup>th</sup> June.
30. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen daily.
31. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
32. **Hobby:** A pair hunting insects at Monfragüe on 31<sup>st</sup> May.
33. **Peregrine Falcon:** Seen at Monfragüe.
34. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen almost daily.
35. **Moorhen:** Seen at Talaván and Arrocampo.
36. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
37. **Common Coot:** Seen at Talaván, Sierra Brava and Arrocampo reservoirs.
38. **Little Bustard:** One at Campo Lugar plains on 1<sup>st</sup> June (and two distantly in flight).
39. **Great Bustard:** Three seen on plains west of Trujillo on 30<sup>th</sup> May and also ten near Campo Lugar on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
40. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on rice fields, Arrocampo and on way to Mérida.
41. **Stone Curlew:** Two on plains near Campo Lugar on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
42. **Collared Pratincole:** About 40 on rice fields on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
43. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
44. **Common Redshank:** Party of 15 on ricefields on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
45. **Black Tern:** Two at Talaván reservoir on 30<sup>th</sup> May.
46. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen on rice fields, Arrocampo and Alange.
47. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
48. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen west of Trujillo on 30<sup>th</sup> May and near Campo Lugar on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
49. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** About 30 west of Trujillo on 30<sup>th</sup> May.
50. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
51. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
52. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
53. **Turtle Dove:** Recorded at Monfragüe National Park.
54. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Two seen on plains near Campo Lugar on 1<sup>st</sup> June and one at Arrocampo on 3<sup>rd</sup> June.
55. **Common Cuckoo:** Seen and/or heard daily.
56. **Scops Owl:** Heard most evenings and a pair seen on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
57. **Little Owl:** Seen and/or heard most days.
58. **Long-eared Owl:** One at Pago de San Clemente on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
59. **Red-necked Nightjar:** Seen on three evenings at Pago de San Clemente.
60. **Alpine Swift:** Seen on several days.
61. **Common Swift:** Seen daily.
62. **Pallid Swift:** Seen at Monfragüe and Trujillo.
63. **White-rumped Swift:** Three seen together at Monfragüe on 31<sup>st</sup> May and two over Rio Almonte near Retamosa on 2<sup>nd</sup> June.
64. **Kingfisher:** Seen on Rio Gargaligas on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
65. **Bee-eater:** Seen daily.
66. **Roller:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and on rice fields.

67. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
68. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen at Miravete Pass.
69. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Pair in Monfragüe on 31<sup>st</sup> May.
70. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo, Campo Lugar and on heath land near Jaraicejo.
71. **Short-toed Lark**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo and Campo Lugar.
72. **Crested Lark**: Seen almost daily.
73. **Thekla Lark**: Seen almost daily.
74. **Woodlark**: Seen at Miravete.
75. **Sand Martin**: Seen at Arrocampo.
76. **Crag Martin**: Seen almost daily.
77. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
78. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Seen daily.
79. **House Martin**: Seen daily.
80. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen at Rio Almonte near Retamosa.
81. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
82. **Rufous Bush Robin**: Two seen in cultivations near Villafranca de los Barros on 4<sup>th</sup> June.
83. **Robin**: Seen in Villuercas mountains and near Valdecañas dam.
84. **Nightingale**: Seen or heard daily.
85. **Black Redstart**: Seen in Monfragüe.
86. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
87. **Black-eared Wheatear**: Seen at Sierra Brava reservoir on 1<sup>st</sup> June, Miravete on 2<sup>nd</sup> June and near Villafranca de los Barros on 4<sup>th</sup> June.
88. **Black Wheatear**: Pair beside River Almonte on 30<sup>th</sup> May, one near Valdecañas dam on 3<sup>rd</sup> June and three or four together at Alange on 4<sup>th</sup> June.
89. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen almost daily.
90. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
91. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen in Villuercas mountains.
92. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen or heard almost daily.
93. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen daily.
94. **Savi's Warbler**: Seen at Arrocampo.
95. **Reed Warbler**: Seen at rice fields and Arrocampo.
96. **Great Reed Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
97. **Melodious Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
98. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen near Jaraicejo.
99. **Spectacled Warbler**: Seen near Jaraicejo
100. **Subalpine Warbler**: Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains.
101. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
102. **Western Orphean Warbler**: Seen at Monfragüe on 31<sup>st</sup> May.
103. **Blackcap**: Singing in Monfragüe, Rio Ruercas in rice fields and Villuercas.
104. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen at Valdecañas.
105. **Blue Tit**: Seen almost daily.
106. **Great Tit**: Seen almost daily.
107. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Recorded at Monfragüe and Villuercas.
108. **Penduline Tit**: Family parties at Arrocampo on 3<sup>rd</sup> June.

109. **Golden Oriole:** Seen at Monfragüe, Rio Gargaligas and Valdecañas.
110. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
111. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
112. **Jay:** Seen at Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
113. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
114. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
115. **Jackdaw:** Seen daily.
116. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
117. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
118. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
119. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
120. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
121. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen in Monfragüe.
122. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
123. **Red Avadavat:** seen on rice fields.
124. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
125. **Serin:** Seen daily.
126. **Greenfinch:** Seen on several days.
127. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
128. **Linnet:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
129. **Hawfinch:** Seen at in garden at Pago de San Clemente and Valdecañas.
130. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen in Villuercas and beside Rio Almonte, south of Jaraicejo.
131. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe and Rio Almonte.
132. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.