

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo
REPORT ON SPRING HOLIDAY FOR MARK FERRIS

Martin Kelsey

Itinerary (30th April to 5th May 2013)

30th April 2013: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo with stop at Cerro Almaráz

1st May 2013: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, Almonte river, Talaván reservoir and Trujillo.

2nd May 2013: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Moheda Alta, Sierra Brava reservoir

3rd May 2013: Monfragüe National Park

4th May 2013: Jaraicejo and Miravete Pass, Villuercas mountains.

5th May 2013: Arrocampo reservoir and return to Madrid airport.

Trip Report

1st May 2013

Mark arrived in good time and we were setting off from Madrid airport shortly after 12.30. After passing the south of Madrid on the M40 ring road, we took the A5 motorway heading south-west for Extremadura. Just after leaving the district of Madrid, we pulled off for a picnic lunch in an area of arable fields and small vineyards. **Crested Larks** and a **Booted Eagle** provided our first taste of local birdlife, shortly to be added to by a juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** that flew low over the road just a few kilometres drive further on. **Black Kites** and **White Storks** were seen on the journey as we left the cereal plains of Castilla la Mancha and entered the more wooded Extremadura, accompanied by the occasional shower of rain. We made a mid-afternoon stop at the Cerro de Almaráz, an outcrop of limestone where we made a foray to look for any remaining orchids, it being already rather late in the spring for the best display. We were rewarded by **Early Spider**, **Woodcock** and Naked **Man orchids**, a **Spanish Purple Hairstreak** butterfly and birds such as **Serin** and **Blue Rock Thrush**. The raptors though stole the show, with a "kettle" of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, joined by **Black Kite**, a **Booted Eagle** and then, offering us excellent views, an adult **Golden Eagle**. Pleased with our first afternoon's birding, we continued the drive to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

1st May 2013

Although it was cloudy at first, there were sunny periods throughout the day. The overcast sky provided us with excellent viewing conditions on the mixed farming plains west of Trujillo. At our first stop we easily found male **Little Bustard**, whilst **Quail** were calling and we could view both **Crested** and **Thekla Larks** from the same spot. Nearby we had superb views of male **Great Bustard** as well as **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, whilst a pair of **Iberian Grey Shrike** was courtship feeding. **Calandra Larks** sang continuously above our heads, or chased each other across the field in front of us. In the same field, we also found a party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and two **Black Vulture**, standing like bulky figures in the meadow. Continuing along a dirt track, a passage **Whinchat** perched on a fence and we found a male **Great Bustard** still in full display. **Calandra Larks** continued to accompany us and a **Montagu's Harrier** quartered the plains. Hardly a minute passed as we were driving without seeing something on the roadside fences: **Corn Bunting**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Thekla Lark** and **Stonechat**. South of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we had great views of the **Rollers** using specially erected nest boxes, and saw **Short-toed Eagle** as well.

We stopped for lunch at the River Almonte. **Alpine Swifts** and **Crag Martins** were nesting at the bridge and we watched a male **Black Wheatear**. Nearby at the Talaván reservoir, we enjoyed good views of a **juvenile Golden Eagle**, whilst on the reservoir itself were nesting **Great Crested** and **Little Grebe**, and a small selection of duck including a male **Garganey** and **Common Pochard**. There was a good rane of butterflies taking advantage of the afternoon sunshine: **Spanish Marbled White**, **Small Copper**, **Black-eyed Blue** and **Clouded Yellows**.

We visited the River Almonte at a site further upstream and watched three **Short-toed Eagles** in display, **Booted Eagle** and a juvenile **Bonelli's Eagle**, whilst a **Cirl Bunting** sang nearby. As we headed back to Trujillo, smart **Spanish Sparrows** lined-up on the fences. We made a stop at the bull-ring in Trujillo to watch the **Lesser Kestrels** returning to their nest sites under the roof tiles from their foraging trips to the plains. Back at Casa Rural El Recuerdo that evening, Mark rounded off the day with a sighting of **Red-necked Nightjar**.

2nd May 2013

Heading south we spent most of the day in the rice growing area near Madrigalejo. Almost all of the fields were ploughed and dry, with just a few having damper areas. These provided productive with a nice selection of waders present including a total of 14 **Kentish Plover**, as well as seven **Grey Plover**, **Ringed Plover**, **Dunlin**, **Common Sandpiper** and **Lapwing**. Two **Roller** were perched on an old barn. Further on in an area known as Moheda Alta, we found a further two **Grey Plover**, **Gull-billed Tern** and **Collared Pratincole**, as well as five over-summering **Common Crane**. We then explored another area of fields, close to the village of Vegas Altas. About a hundred **Collared Pratincoles** were present here, providing us with quite a magnificent

spectacle, but also pleasing were passage **Yellow Wagtails**, including a fine male *thumbergi* race.

We completed the afternoon viewing the Sierra Brava reservoir, where a male **Black-eared Wheatear** was present, as were Gull-billed Tern, **Black-headed Gull**, **Gadwall** and **Mallard**. On the adjacent fields we saw three **Great Bustard**. Heading back to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we had sightings of both **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and **Common Cuckoo**.

A **Melodious Warbler** was singing along the lane close to the house in the evening.

3rd May 2013

Today was spent at the famous Monfragüe National Park, one of the top locations internationally for watching breeding birds of prey. At our first stop we enjoyed prolonged and excellent views of a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**: perched, calling and in flight. The viewpoint also offered us **Griffon** and **Black Vulture** and **Peregrine**, whilst an **Egyptian Vulture** was nesting nearby. **Rock Buntings** and **Subalpine Warblers** were present in the immediate vicinity of where we stood, whilst later we saw the first **Marsh Fritillary Butterfly** of the spring. Opposite the massive rock face of Peña Falcon, we watched **Peregrine**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart** and **Rock Bunting**, as well as **Black Stork** and numerous **Griffon Vultures**. We completed the day at the top of the Monfragüe castle tower, enjoying a magnificent view along the top of the ridge, the opportunity to watch vultures passing by at close range. However, the main target for us was **White-rumped Swift** and our patience paid-off. After an hour and a quarter of scanning, we were superbly compensated by close-range views of the bird, as it approached us, and circled nearby, before heading off again in the direction in which it came. Certainly one of the highlights of the whole holiday.

4th May 2013

The focus shifted today to smaller birds and we started the day in a belt of cork oak woodland near Jaraicejo. Here we secured pleasing views of **Western Orphean Warbler**, another target species for the trip, as well as **Woodlark**, **Rock Sparrow** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**. In adjacent heath land, there were numerous **Dartford Warbler** and **Thekla Lark**, as well as a pair of **Spectacled Warbler**.

We stopped briefly at the Miravete Pass, where we saw **Crested Tit**, before driving east into the Villuercas mountains. We moved up through belts of different types of woodland: holm oak, cork oak, Pyrenean oak, and then we reached the scrub layer at the peak of the range, at 1600 metres above sea-level. Here there were singing **Dunnock**, **Subalpine Warblers** and **Rock Bunting**. An attractive narcissus (*N. rupicola*) was in flower at the highest points. Back at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, Mark obtained further views of **Red-necked Nightjar**.

5th May 2013

We set off for the return to Madrid, but with a scheduled stop first of all at the Arrocampo reservoir. As we arrived, we saw another of the sought-for species: **Black-winged Kite**, which we managed to see very well both perched and in flight (including its distinctive hovering and glide). The marshes surrounding the reservoir provided productive as well, with **Savi's Warbler**, **Little Bittern**, numerous **Purple Heron**, **Purple Swamphen** and **Bearded Tit**, as well as **Gull-billed Tern** with **Pallid** and **Common Swift** overhead. A surprise was a pair of **Ferruginous Duck**, seen in flight at two points of the reservoir. **Lesser Kestrels** were feeding over the fields, and as we left a **Black Vulture** drifted from the direction of Monfragüe, seemingly travelling kilometres without a single flap of its wings. It was then a smooth and uneventful journey back to Madrid, to reach the airport in good time for Mark's check-in and departure.

Annotated list of birds seen

On a short six-day break, an excellent total of 146 species recorded.

1. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Talaván reservoir.
2. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen most days on large water bodies.
3. **Great Cormorant**: Seen at Monfragüe and Arrocampo.
4. **Little Bittern**: Seen on River Gargaligas and Arrocampo.
5. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen at Arrocampo.
6. **Cattle Egret**: Seen almost daily.
7. **Little Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo.
8. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
9. **Purple Heron**: Good numbers at Arrocampo.
10. **Black Stork**: Seen over River Almonte, Monfragüe National Park and Jaraicejo.
11. **White Stork**: Seen daily.
12. **Gadwall**: Seen at Talaván and Sierra Brava reservoirs.
13. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
14. **Garganey**: A male at Talaván on 1st May.
15. **Common Pochard**: A male at Talaván on 1st May.
16. **Ferruginous Duck**: A pair at Arrocampo on 5th May.
17. **Black-winged Kite**: One at Arrocampo on 5th May.
18. **Black Kite**: Seen daily.
19. **Red Kite**: Seen almost daily.
20. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen in Monfragüe and near Jaraicejo.
21. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen daily.
22. **Black Vulture**: Seen daily.
23. **Short-toed Eagle**: Seen almost daily.
24. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost daily.
25. **Montagu's Harrier**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo and at Jaraicejo.
26. **Common Buzzard**: Seen daily.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: A juvenile seen just outside Madrid on 30th April and a pair in Monfragüe National Park on 3rd May.
28. **Golden Eagle**: An adult at Cerro Almaráz on 30th April and a juvenile at Talaván on 1st May.

29. **Booted Eagle**: Seen daily.
30. **Bonelli's Eagle**: A sub-adult at River Almonte on 1st May.
31. **Lesser Kestrel**: Seen daily.
32. **Common Kestrel**: Seen almost daily.
33. **Peregrine Falcon**: Seen at Monfragüe.
34. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen almost daily.
35. **Quail**: Heard on plains and rice fields.
36. **Water Rail**: Heard at Talaván and on rice fields.
37. **Moorhen**: Seen at Talaván and rice fields.
38. **Purple Swamphen**: Seen at Arrocampo.
39. **Common Coot**: Seen at Talaván and Arrocampo reservoirs.
40. **Common Crane**: Five birds at Moheda Alta on 2nd May.
41. **Little Bustard**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo on 1st May.
42. **Great Bustard**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo on 1st May and near Sierra Brava reservoir on 2nd May.
43. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on rice fields.
44. **Collared Pratincole**: Seen at Talaván on 1st May and in good numbers (100+) on rice fields on 2nd May.
45. **Ringed Plover**: 35 on rice fields on 2nd May.
46. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen on rice fields.
47. **Kentish Plover**: A total of 14 seen on rice fields on 2nd May.
48. **Grey Plover**: Seven on rice fields on 2nd May.
49. **Northern Lapwing**: Three on rice fields on 2nd May.
50. **Dunlin**: Two on rice fields on 2nd May.
51. **Greenshank**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
52. **Common Sandpiper**: One on rice fields on 2nd May.
53. **Whimbrel**: One on rice fields on 2nd May.
54. **Gull-billed Tern**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
55. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
56. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen west of Trujillo on 1st May.
57. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Seen west of Trujillo on 1st May.
58. **Feral Pigeon**: Seen daily.
59. **Wood Pigeon**: Seen daily.
60. **Collared Dove**: Seen daily.
61. **Turtle Dove**: Seen at Monfragüe National Park.
62. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo on 1st May and near Sierra Brava reservoir on 2nd May.
63. **Common Cuckoo**: Seen and/or heard daily.
64. **Scops Owl**: Heard each evening.
65. **Little Owl**: Recorded at Pago de San Clemente.
66. **Red-necked Nightjar**: Recorded each evening, with sightings on two evenings at Pago de San Clemente.
67. **Alpine Swift**: Seen on several days.
68. **Common Swift**: Seen daily.
69. **Pallid Swift**: Seen at Arrocampo on 5th May.
70. **White-rumped Swift**: One at Monfragüe Castle on 3rd May.
71. **Kingfisher**: Seen almost daily.
72. **Bee-eater**: Seen daily.
73. **Roller**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo and on rice fields.
74. **Hoopoe**: Seen almost daily.

75. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains.
76. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo on 1st May and on heath land near Jaraicejo on 4th May.
77. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on plains and rice fields.
78. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost daily.
79. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
80. **Woodlark:** Seen west of Trujillo and near Jaraicejo.
81. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
82. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
83. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
84. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
85. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
86. **Tawny Pipit:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo on 1st May.
87. **Yellow Wagtail:** Iberian and Grey-headed forms seen on rice fields on 2nd May.
88. **White Wagtail:** seen on rice fields.
89. **Wren:** Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains.
90. **Dunnock:** Two singing in Villuercas mountains.
91. **Robin:** Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains.
92. **Nightingale:** Seen daily.
93. **Black Redstart:** Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains.
94. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
95. **Whinchat:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and on rice fields.
96. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and Jaraicejo.
97. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen at Sierra Brava reservoir on 2nd May.
98. **Black Wheatear:** Male beside River Almomnte on 1st May.
99. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
101. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen west of Trujillo and near Jaraicejo.
102. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
103. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen almost daily.
104. **Savi's Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo on 5th May.
105. **Sedge Warbler:** One beside River Gargaligas on 2nd May.
106. **Reed Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
107. **Great Reed Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Melodious Warbler:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente and Villuercas mountains.
109. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 4th May.
110. **Spectacled Warbler:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 4th May.
111. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains.
112. **Sardinain Warbler:** Seen daily.
113. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Heard west of Trujillo on 1st May and seen well near Jaraicejo on 4th May.
114. **Blackcap:** Singing in Monfragüe.
115. **Iberian/Common Chiffchaff:** One giving very short bursts of song near Jaraicejo on 4th May.
116. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen beside River Gargaligas.
117. **Crested Tit:** seen at Miravete Pass on 4th May.

118. **Blue Tit:** Seen daily.
119. **Great Tit:** Seen daily.
120. **Bearded Tit:** Seen at Arrocampo on 5th May.
121. **Nuthatch:** Recorded at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
122. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
123. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at River Gargaligas on 2nd May and Arrocampo on 5th May.
124. **Golden Oriole:** Recorded almost daily.
125. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
126. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
127. **Jay:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 4th May.
128. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
129. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
130. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
131. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
132. **Spotless Starling:** seen daily.
133. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
134. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and on rice fields.
135. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
136. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
137. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
138. **Red Avadavat:** seen on rice fields.
139. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
140. **Serin:** Seen daily.
141. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
142. **Linnet:** Seen daily.
143. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains.
144. **Cirl Bunting:** Recorded beside River Almonte and Villuercas mountains.
145. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains.
146. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.