

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

Holiday Report for Jane and Don Walton

5th June to 17th June 2013

Itinerary

Jane and Don also had several “free” days which they spent walking locally or visiting their friend Neil Renwick.

5th June 2013: Collection at Madrid Barajas airport and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, near Trujillo, Extremadura.

6th June 2013: Monfragüe National Park.

9th June 2013: Plains near Campo Lugar, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Sierra Brava reservoir.

10th June 2013: Plains and river valleys near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca

11th June 2013: Arrocampo Reservoir and woodland near Valdecañas dam.

13th June 2013: Plains near Cáceres, Almonte River and Talaván reservoir, followed by a visit to Trujillo.

16th June 2013: Woodlands near Cañamero, Guadalupe and Pico de Villuercas.

17th June 2013: Return visit to Monfragüe National Park, followed by transfer to Madrid.

Holiday diary

5th June 2013

Jane and Don were met at Terminal 1 of Barajas airport in Madrid by Martin and we took the ring road clockwise around the south of Madrid, before joining the A5 motorway heading south-west towards Extremadura. We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, welcomed by Claudia.

6th June 2013

Jane was particularly keen to get to grips with raptors as soon as possible, so we spent our first full day in the Monfragüe National Park. This 18,000 hectare park lies north of Trujillo in an area of deeply folded quartzites and sandstones,

intersected through by the two great rivers of Cáceres province: the Tajo and Tiétar. It was beside the latter where we made our first stop, where it enters the park from the north, cutting through the ridge to create a rocky gateway called the Portilla del Tiétar. Here we had magnificent views of **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, as well as **Egyptian Vulture**, nesting **Griffon Vultures**, **Rock Buntings** and **White-rumped Swifts**. **Spanish Purple Hairstreak** butterflies were on the wing. Close-by is an attractive belt of cork oak *dehesa*, where we enjoyed watching **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** coming to feed nearly fully-fledged young at their nest. **Golden Orioles** were in flight around us, whilst we had views of **Western Orphean Warbler** close to our coffee stop!

We had a picnic lunch opposite the cliffs at the Tajadilla viewpoint where large **Griffon Vulture** nestlings waited to be fed and **Black Vultures** drifted overhead.

Finally, we enjoyed the remainder of the afternoon at the viewpoint opposite the massive Peña Falcon rock, home for many pairs of **Griffon Vultures**. Two **Black Stork** nests were also in view, both with chicks. As we stood, wave after wave of **Griffon Vultures** were drifting in, passing above us, at eye-level and below and making well calculated descents, legs acting as air-brakes, to land with precision on their nesting ledges. Two **Peregrines** were in view above us, whilst a fine **Booted Eagle** circled nearby.

9th June 2013

We started the day in open country, an area lying south of Casa Rural El Recuerdo, near the village of Campo Lugar. At our first stop we started seeing species typical of this traditional landscape such as three **Great Bustards**, and **Calandra Larks**. The endless hue of yellowing grasses was broken by the dramatic **Cardoon Thistles**, whilst with each step we took into the grass, countless grasshoppers were displaced. It was this food source that was attracting parties of **Ravens**, **Black Kites** and **White Storks**. Following a rough track, we had good flight views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, but best of all was finding a calling male **Little Bustard**, which we watched for a good length of time.

We descended from the dry plains to the nearby rice-growing area, where many of the fields were flooded and the young rice shoots showing. Although most of the fields had little birdlife, some had attracted **Black-winged Stilts** and we also came across a party of **Ringed Plovers** and **Kentish Plover**. We had good views of Roller whilst a flock of 170 **Lapwing** was an interesting find (early arrivals from the north), as were **Green Sandpiper** and **Black-tailed Godwit**. A stony field being used for a crop of maize was the venue for a colony of **Collared Pratincoles**.

We had our picnic beside the River Gargaligas, where **Nightingales**, **Cetti's Warblers** and **Great Reed Warblers** sang and we also enjoyed good views of a **Little Bittern**.

We then visited an area to the east, walking beside an area of rice fields known as Moheda Alta, famous in the winter for its large numbers of wintering **Common Cranes**, and it was here where we found four over-summering individuals.

We drove through an area where two large thermo-solar plants have been established beside more rice fields, where we found a pair of **Yellow Wagtail**. Then up beside a canal to the Sierra Brava reservoir, which is one of the sources of water for the extensive rice-growing region. There was little on the large expanse of water, save **Great Crested Grebe**.

10th June 2013

It being another rather cool and overcast day (unusual for this time of the year) we decided again to visit open country habitat.

The area between Trujillo and Cáceres combines the open plains of traditional mixed farming, tracts of *dehesa* (wood pasture dominated by holm oaks) and deep steep-sided river valleys. We stopped at first on the edge of the plains, with the town of Trujillo to our east, magnificent on the summit of a granite batholith. A **Great Spotted Cuckoo** walked in front of the vehicle as we slowed down for our first stop. Surrounding us was the sound of lark song: **Crested, Thekla** and **Calandra Larks**. A small party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** flew in, to land in the field beside us. **Black Kites** patrolled the skies.

We took a wide dirt road north across the plains, with the above-mentioned larks, as well as **Short-toed Larks**, encountered along it. It was here, perched on a large concrete gate post, that we found a very unusual bird, a vagrant **Lanner Falcon**, probably only the fourth record for Extremadura. We had excellent views of it perched on the post, before it flew low across the field and landed on a rocky outcrop, affording us more prolonged views.

Following coffee in the square of the little village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we visited first the Tamuja and then the Magasca valleys where **Crag Martins** and **Red-rumped Swallows** hawked insects near the bridges. A **Black Stork** flew up from the water's edge as we arrived at the Magasca. There we had lunch.

In the afternoon we stopped beside the road to watch magnificent food passes by **Montagu's Harriers**, although we were careful not to linger too long in one spot as monstrous ticks were emerging from the grasses! A party of nine **Great Bustards** provided an additional bonus.

We continued, passing a derelict water mill with an old house opposite almost completely covered by **White Stork** nests, we then rose onto the granite batholith, where the gorgeous weathered rocky outcrops created a wonderful landscape.

11th June 2013

There was a change of habitat today with a visit first of all to the reed beds of the Arrocampo reservoir. This water body provides the cooling water for the Almaráz Nuclear Power station and maintains a constant water depth as well as above-average water temperature, thus encouraging an excellent fringe of emergent vegetation. Here we had good views of nesting **Purple Heron**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Great Egret**, **Purple Swamphen** and warblers like **Savi's** and **Great Reed**. A party of **Mallard** when flew up from the feeds contained a **Ferruginous Duck**. **Marsh Harriers** quartered the reeds and **Little Grebes** scurried over the water's surface.

We then stopped nearby at a small mixed wooded valley near the Valdecañas dam for lunch and to spend the afternoon there. As well as a mix of woodland birds including **Golden Oriole**, the area provided interesting for raptors with **Griffon** and **Egyptian Vulture** and an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**.

13th June 2013

Back to the plains west of Trujillo, this time close to the provincial capital of Cáceres. We stopped first if all in an area where nest boxes have provided breeding sites for **Rollers**, **Little Owls** and **Lesser Kestrels**, along with **Jackdaws** and **Spotless Starlings**, and we had good views of all.

We moved then to the River Almonte, walking beside a narrow tributary of the river. Here **Alpine Swifts** wheeled overhead, whilst a juvenile **Golden Eagle** drifted over. On then we went to the Talaván reservoir where we had lunch beside the river flowing into the lake. Here there were breeding **Great Reed Warblers**, **Great Crested Grebes** and **Water Rails** calling. Near the dam of the reservoir a pair of **Little Tern** frequented a floating, shingle-covered raft.

We returned to Trujillo via a stop at another bridge across the Almonte River and the plains south of the village of Monroy. In Trujillo, we stopped in the Main Square and enjoyed the sight of packs of **Common** and **Pallid Swift** dashing around the buildings, **Lesser Kestrels** buoyantly rising over the rooftops, nesting **White Storks** and a **Booted Eagle** which glided low overhead.

16th June 2013

Today we headed to the Villuercas mountains, lying in the east of Cáceres province and described as one of the finest examples of Appalachian relief in Europe. We spent the morning on the western slopes above the town of Cañamero, walking through a belt of pine, Pyrenean Oak and patches of Eucalyptus. The highlight was a delightful **Western Bonelli's Warbler** which sang from the branches close to where we stood. On our return to the car an equally enchanting **Melodious Warbler** sang for minutes from a branch of a nearby pine tree.

After coffee in Cañamero, we passed Guadalupe and took the small road which climbed to the highest point in the Villuercas range. The rough road took us initially through pine plantations, then groves of Sweet Chestnut and the Pyrenean Oak, with the latter becoming shorter in stature the higher we climbed. We stopped for our picnic close to the medieval *Pozo de Nieve* (a deep stone-lined pit where snow was brought to provide a store of ice). As we lunched a **Honey Buzzard** rose to give its distinctive wing-quivering display flight.

From the peak itself (at 1600 metres above sea-level) we could not only see the whole Villuercas range in splendour, but also well beyond to the Gredos Mountains and the Montes de Toledo. **Rock Buntings** and **Black Redstart** were present at the top, a **Hobby** was hunting lying insects high above us, whilst **Red-rumped Swallows** and **House Martins** fly past much closer.

On our descent, we stopped at a clearing in the oak woods and watched the strange and beautiful Owlfly as it was hunting other flying insects over the vegetation.

17th June 2013

We bade farewell to Claudia at Casa Rural El Recuerdo and headed north for a final and brief visit to the Monfragüe National Park, this time concentrating at the large Peña Falcon and the Tajadilla viewpoints. We enjoyed again sightings of **Black Stork**, **Griffon**, **Black** and **Egyptian Vultures**, although pride of place was probably a singing **Black-eared Wheatear**.

We then took the motorway north of the park, joining the A5 for Madrid. We stopped en route for coffee and rolls and then reached the airport at Madrid at the anticipated check-in time.

Annotated list of birds seen

For a summer holiday in June, an excellent total of 140 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.
6. **Cattle Egret**: Seen almost daily.
7. **Little Egret**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
8. **Great Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo.
9. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
10. **Purple Heron**: Good numbers at Arrocampo.
11. **Black Stork**: Seen over River Magasca, River Almonte and Monfragüe National Park.

12. **White Stork**: Seen daily.
13. **Gadwall**: Seen at Arrocampo and Talaván reservoirs.
14. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
15. **Shoveler**: Seen on rest day at Valdesalor Reservoir.
16. **Common Pochard**: One male at Talaván on 13th June
17. **Ferruginous Duck**: One with flock of Mallard at Arrocampo on 11th June.
18. **Honey Buzzard**: Displaying bird over Guadalupe on 16th June.
19. **Black Kite**: Seen daily.
20. **Red Kite**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
21. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen at Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
22. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen daily.
23. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
24. **Short-toed Eagle**: Seen almost daily.
25. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen at the rice fields and Arrocampo.
26. **Montagu's Harrier**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th and 13th June.
27. **Common Buzzard**: Seen almost daily.
28. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: A pair in Monfragüe National Park on 6th June and one over Valdecañas dam on 11th June.
29. **Golden Eagle**: A juvenile at River Almonte on 13th June.
30. **Booted Eagle**: Seen almost daily.
31. **Lesser Kestrel**: Seen daily.
32. **Common Kestrel**: Seen almost daily.
33. **Hobby**: One over Pico de Villuercas on 16th June.
34. **Peregrine Falcon**: Seen at Monfragüe.
35. **Lanner Falcon**: One sub-adult near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th June. 4th record for Extremadura.
36. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
37. **Water Rail**: Heard at Talaván.
38. **Moorhen**: Seen at Arrocampo.
39. **Purple Swamphen**: Seen at Arrocampo.
40. **Common Coot**: Seen at Talaván and Arrocampo reservoirs.
41. **Common Crane**: Four over-summering birds at Moheda Alta on 9th June.
42. **Little Bustard**: One at Campo Lugar plains on 9th June.
43. **Great Bustard**: Three seen on plains near Campo Lugar on 9th June and 9 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th June.
44. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on rice fields.
45. **Stone Curlew**: Heard near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th June.
46. **Collared Pratincole**: Seen on rice fields.
47. **Ringed Plover**: Seven seen on rice fields.
48. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen on rice fields and a nesting bird at Talaván.
49. **Kentish Plover**: Two on seen on rice fields.
50. **Northern Lapwing**: 170 seen on rice fields on 9th June.
51. **Black-tailed Godwit**: 4 seen on rice fields on 9th June.
52. **Greenshank**: Five seen on rice fields.
53. **Green Sandpiper**: Two seen on rice fields on 9th June.
54. **Little Tern**: Two at Talaván on 13th June.
55. **Black-headed Gull**: About 20 seen on rice fields.
56. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Four seen near Campo Lugar on 9th June.

57. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Six west of Trujillo on 10th June.
58. **Feral Pigeon**: Seen daily.
59. **Wood Pigeon**: Seen daily.
60. **Collared Dove**: Seen daily.
61. **Turtle Dove**: Recorded at Monfragüe National Park.
62. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: One seen near Trujillo on 5th June and a juvenile near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th June
63. **Common Cuckoo**: Seen at Monfragüe and near Santa Marta de Magasca,
64. **Scops Owl**: Heard on 9th June.
65. **Little Owl**: Seen and/or heard most days.
66. **Long-eared Owl**: One at Pago de San Clemente on 9th June.
67. **Alpine Swift**: Seen at Monfragüe and River Almonte.
68. **Common Swift**: Seen daily.
69. **Pallid Swift**: Seen at Trujillo.
70. **White-rumped Swift**: Seen at Monfragüe on 6th June.
71. **Kingfisher**: Seen on Rio Gargaligas, Rio Magasca and Talaván Reservoir.
72. **Bee-eater**: Seen almost daily.
73. **Roller**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo and on rice fields.
74. **Hoopoe**: Seen almost daily.
75. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen near Cañamero on 16th June.
76. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Pair in Monfragüe on 6th June.
77. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo and Campo Lugar.
78. **Short-toed Lark**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo on 10th June
79. **Crested Lark**: Seen almost daily.
80. **Thekla Lark**: Seen almost daily.
81. **Woodlark**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
82. **Sand Martin**: Seen at Arrocampo and Talaván.
83. **Crag Martin**: Seen almost daily.
84. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
85. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Seen daily.
86. **House Martin**: Seen daily.
87. **Yellow Wagtail**: A pair on rice fields near Madrigalejo on 9th June.
88. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen at River Magasca.
89. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
90. **Wren**: Heard almost daily.
91. **Robin**: Seen in Monfragüe and heard in Villuercas Mountains.
92. **Nightingale**: Seen or heard daily.
93. **Black Redstart**: Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
94. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily.
95. **Black-eared Wheatear**: One seen in Monfragüe on 17th June.
96. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
97. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
98. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen in Monfragüe.
99. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen or heard almost daily.
100. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen almost daily.
101. **Savi's Warbler**: Seen at Arrocampo.
102. **Reed Warbler**: Seen at rice fields and Arrocampo.
103. **Great Reed Warbler**: Seen rice fields, Talaván and Arrocampo.

104. **Melodious Warbler:** Seen beside River Almonte and near Cañamero.
105. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
106. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen in Villuercas mountains.
107. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Seen at Monfragüe on 6th June.
109. **Blackcap:** Seen and/heard almost daily.
110. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** Seen near Cañamero on 16th June.
111. **Long-tailed Tit:** Recorded in Villuercas Mountains.
112. **Crested Tit:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
113. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
114. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
115. **Nuthatch:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
116. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded at Monfragüe, Valdecañas and Villuercas.
117. **Golden Oriole:** Seen at Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
118. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
119. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
120. **Jay:** Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
121. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
122. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
123. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
124. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
125. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
126. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
127. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen at Talaván and on rest day at Valdesalor Reservoir..
128. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
129. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen in Monfragüe.
130. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
131. **Red Avadavat:** seen on rice fields.
132. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
133. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
134. **Greenfinch:** Seen on several days.
135. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
136. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
137. **Hawfinch:** Seen at in garden at Pago de San Clemente, Monfragüe and Villuercas.
138. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe
139. **Rock Bunting:** Seen almost daily.
140. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

Butterflies identified (22 species)

Swallowtail
 Small White
 Bath White
 Clouded Yellow
 Cleopatra
 Spanish Purple Hairstreak

Small Copper
Sooty Copper
Lang's Short-tailed Blue
Common Blue
Large Tortoiseshell
Painted lady
Comma
Cardinal
Queen of Spain Fritillary
Spotted Fritillary
Spanish Marbled White
Great Banded Grayling
Meadow Brown
Spanish Gatekeeper
Speckled Wood
Small Skipper

Other interesting wildlife

Owlfly sp.
Montpellier Snake