

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

REPORT ON SPRING HOLIDAY FOR ED OWEN

Itinerary (19th April - 26th April 2014)

19th April 2014: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Arrocampo reservoir.

20th April 2014: Plains around Santa Marta de Magasca and Belen, followed by visit to Tozo Reservoir.

21st April 2014: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and the reservoirs of Orellana and Sierra Brava.

22nd April 2014: Monfragüe National Park and heath land near Jaraicejo.

23rd April 2014: Villuercas Mountains.

24th April 2014: Zorita, Acollarín Reservoir and rice fields near Madrigalejo.

25th April 2014: Villafranca de Los Barros, Alange and Mérida.

26th April 2014: Return to Madrid airport.

Trip Report

Overall the week was fine, although with cooler than usual temperatures and fresh breezes. There was some rain on morning of 21st April.

Day 1: 19th April 2014: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Arrocampo reservoir.

Ed arrived on time at Madrid and after following the ring road around the southern side of Madrid, we headed south-west on the A5 motorway to Extremadura. We arrived at the Arrocampo Reservoir early afternoon and we made an initial stop at a point where we could enjoy lunch looking across the water and the activities of several **Gull-billed Terns**. After lunch we made of tour of the various viewpoints around the marsh. **Savi's Warblers** were singing in full voice and we obtained excellent views of them. We also found a male **Little Bittern**, as well as several **Purple Swamphen**, **Purple Heron** and **Great Egret**. Near to the reservoir we saw a **Black-winged Kite** and the fences also provided good perches for a number of typical species such as **Corn Bunting**, **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Woodchat Shrike**. Pleased with the start of the holiday we then completed our journey, arriving at Casa Rural El Recuerdo shortly after 18.00.

Day 2: 20th April 2014: Plains around Santa Marta de Magasca and Belen, followed by visit to Tozo Reservoir.

We set off at 08.00 to explore the plains to the west of Trujillo. After passing through an area of *dehesa* woodland, dominated by holm oak, we entered the edge of open country. Here at our first stop we watched three **Little Bustard** males in courtship flights and started our acquaintance with **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**. A few minutes later we were obtaining excellent views of a group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** on the

ground, as well as two **Stone Curlew** and our first **Great Bustard**. **Calandra Larks** provided excellent distraction too as they sang and chased each other near at hand. A newly arrived **Turtle Dove** flew over. Following a dirt road, we managed to get some flight views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, as well as good views of a displaying **Great Bustard**. In the distance birds of prey were starting to get on the wing, including both **Black** and **Red Kite** and a juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. Ploughed land proved an attraction for **Short-toed Lark** and we had good views of them. We then visited the plains to the south of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. Here a variety of species were using nest boxes set up for **Rollers**. As well as nine **Rollers**, there were also **Little Owl**, **Lesser Kestrel**, **Jackdaw** and **Spotless Starling**. We spent some time watching the graceful flight of **Montagu's Harrier**, there being three males and a female, close to the road. Two **Roe Deer** were seen crossing the road.

We stopped for coffee in the village, where **Spanish Sparrows** and **Crag Martins** were present, before making a stop beside the River Magasca. Here too, **Crag Martins** together with **Red-rumped Swallows** hawked insects.

Returning to the plains, we had a picnic beside an ancient drovers' trail, with a superb skyline. We watched as **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** passed over head. Taking a route back towards Trujillo, we stopped to look at parties of **Spanish Sparrows** lined-up on the fences and had excellent views of a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoos** courtship feeding.

Along the plains to the east of Trujillo we had several views of **Bee-eaters**, as well as both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** on the ground. We completed the afternoon with a very pleasant walk along the Tozo River to a small reservoir. Here there were a few ducks including **Common Pochard**, three **Spoonbill** and **Black-winged Stilts**. Two **Melodious Warblers** were also seen and we found several good specimens of **Common Broomrape**.

Day 3: 21st April 2014: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and the reservoirs of Orellana and Sierra Brava.

With rain during the first half of the day, we elected to concentrate our efforts in wet habitats, checking the rice fields, rivers and ditches near the town of Madrigalejo, to the south of Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

At our first stop, close to the village of Palazuelo, we found small parties of waders, including a **Grey Plover**, as well as **Dunlin**, **Ringed Plovers** and **Kentish Plovers**. **Red Avadavats** and **Common Waxbills** flew in small groups from the ditches. Despite the rain, we watched **Collared Pratincole** flying low over a ploughed field, although most of them were quietly standing, facing the wind.

We explored some of the rice fields near the village of Vegas Altas, where we saw several Iberian race of **Yellow Wagtail**, as well as **Gull-billed Terns** and **Black-winged Stilts**. We made a stop beside the River Gargaligas, where a male **Little Bittern** made an appearance and **Great Reed Warblers** were singing. Following coffee, we moved onto the the Orellana Reservoir. Here we had lunch, but the poor weather hampered birding prospects. We returned to visit an area of rice fields near Madrigalejo. Here in old gravel workings there was a pair of **Red-crested Pochard** as well as a group of **Spoonbill** and a large gathering of **Cattle Egret**. We took dirt tracks and found several fields with extensive water. Here there was an interesting range of waders, including **Avocet**, more **Grey Plover** and most memorably a fine male **Ruff** in full breeding plumage, behaving as if on a lek when other Ruff approached. **A Black Tern**, also in breeding plumage, was resting nearby. As we moved through the area we

saw a **Black-winged Kite**, some **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and more flooded fields, this time with more **Avocets**.

We completed our day with a stop at the Sierra Brava reservoir. Again the windy conditions made viewing difficult, but we did find a pair of **Black-eared Wheatear** beside a rocky outcrop.

Day 4: 22nd April 2014: Monfragüe National Park and heath land near Jaraicejo.

With fine weather forecast and the busy Easter weekend over, we ventured today northwards to the Monfragüe National Park. The journey took us through the vast *dehesa* landscapes north of Trujillo, until reaching the east-west escarpments marking the park. We made our first stop at the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint in the north of the park. Here we had an excellent start of the day with superb views of an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, in flight at all levels, with the sun catching its pure-white leading edge to the wing magnificently. On the rock-face we also could see an adult **Eagle Owl** at its nest, tucked into a crevice but sometimes turning its head to show us its face. The rock face was also home to a colony of **Griffon Vultures**, whilst both **Black** and **Egyptian Vultures** were also seen, as well as **Black Stork**. The outcrops also offered perches for birds like **Rock Bunting**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart**. After this, we took coffee and spent some time in an area of cork oak woodland. Here we easily found **Rock Sparrows**, calling and perching near by. There were also **Short-toed Treecreepers** and **Nuthatches** present.

We made a third stop in another wooded area, where a male **Golden Oriole** was briefly seen. **Turtle Doves** called from the tree-tops. Further on, overlooking a small valley we stopped again. Here more **Golden Orioles** were calling and whilst we waited, a fine adult **Bonelli's Eagle** came into view.

We had lunch at another vantage point, with close range **Griffon Vultures** causing constant interest. We then made a final stop opposite the impressive Peña Falcon rock face. Here we watched a **Peregrine** circling around, two more **Bonelli's Eagles**, as well as excellent views of **Rock Bunting** and **Blue Rock Thrush**.

Leaving Monfragüe we visited an area of broom and lavender heath near the small town of Jaraicejo. Despite being mid-afternoon, we quickly found and had good views of **Dartford** and **Spectacled Warblers**, whilst in an area of cork oak woodland nearby we found **Western Orphean Warbler**.

We completed the day with a brief visit to the main square of Trujillo, where **White Storks**, **swifts** and **Lesser Kestrels** mingled in the sky together.

Day 5: 23rd April 2014: Villuercas Mountains.

Today we headed east to the Villuercas Mountains, a mountain range made from deep folded sandstones and quartzites. We climbed above the belt of evergreen oak to deciduous woodland, dominated by Pyrenean Oak. Our quest here was the **Western Bonelli's Warbler** and we found a singing bird quite quickly and obtained excellent views of this very pale little warbler. In the same mixed woodland, with its zones of planted eucalyptus and pines, we also saw **Iberian Green Woodpecker**, **Crested Tit** and **Nuthatch**. We then ascended to the highest point in the range, at 1600 metres. However, low cloud had descended and visibility was poor, so we descended to stop for coffee at the next village.

From here we went downstream of the River Almonte, stopping for lunch overlooking an impressive gorge and then taking a walk at the village of Cabañas del Castillo. The view across the landscape here was remarkable. We returned to the highest point and were now rewarded with views extending vast distances across a succession of mountain ranges in almost every direction. Here we saw two **Red-billed Chough**, as well as several **Rock Buntings** and **Black Redstart**.

Day 6: 24th April 2014: Zorita, Acollarín Reservoir and rice fields near Madrigalejo.

Our first stop was beside a small pool near Zorita where we quickly found a pair of **Red-knobbed Coot**, one of which had been reported the evening before. We obtained excellent views of this species, which is very rare in Extremadura. Also present was a male **Red-crested Pochard** and a **Purple Heron**. Very pleased with this sighting we continued south to visit a newly developed reservoir, near Alcollarín. There was an interesting range of species present, including **Spoonbill**, **Purple Heron**, **Kentish Plover**, **Egyptian Goose** and other waterfowl, such as **Teal**, **Pochard** and **Shoveler**.

Following coffee, we then returned to the rice fields that we had explored a few days earlier. Here we found a beautiful **Turnstone**, in full breeding plumage, as well as two **Whiskered Tern**, **Ringed Plover** and **Kentish Plover**. We stopped for lunch at the River Gargaligas before spending the afternoon near Madrigalejo. The rice fields here were also productive, with a similar selection of waders that we had seen before, with the addition of **Whimbrel** and **Curlew Sandpiper**. We found another male Ruff in breeding plumage, but a different individual from that which had been present before.

In the evening we walked to the edge of the village in the hope of nocturnal species, but the strong winds and rather cold temperature meant that the exercise was fruitless, apart from the sound of calling **Stone Curlews** and a distant **Scops Owl**.

Day 7: 25th April 2014: Villafranca de Los Barros, Alange and Mérida.

Today we headed to southern Extremadura to visit first of all the Tierra de Barros, a vast area of olive and wine production, in order to see whether Rufous Bush Robins had yet arrived. Despite extensive searching we failed to find the bird, it being a few days before the expected arrival date for the species. However we did see **Montagu's Harriers**. From there we drove towards Alange, stopped at the Torremejias lagoons where 13 **Great Flamingoes** were present and two **Collared Pratincole**. At Alange we walked beside the great crag and soon were enjoying excellent views of **two Black Wheatear**. There were also good numbers of **Blue Rock Thrush**, as well as **Sardinian** and **Subalpine Warblers**. **Gull-billed Terns** and a **Black-crowned Night Heron** were seen to our right across the great expanse of Alange reservoir.

We had lunch beside the Guadiana River and then took a walk in an area teeming with **Nightingales**, **Cetti's Warblers** as well as some **Golden Oriole**. We also had good views of birds of prey overhead, such as **Booted** and **Short-toed Eagles** and **Black Kite**.

We completed our trip with a walk along the Roman Bridge in Mérida. As well as swifts, **Purple** and **Black-crowned Night Herons** and **Reed Warblers**, we had wonderful views of a male **Penduline Tit** building its nest.

After a stop for shopping we returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo. In the evening we made a second foray for night birds. The weather conditions being better, we managed to get a good view of a **Red-necked Nightjar**, as well as hearing them calling and a

Long-eared Owl which flew over. However, the **Scops Owls**, although heard, were not close enough to try to see.

Day 8: 26th April 2014: Return to Madrid airport.

We set off from Casa Rural El Recuerdo just before 07.00 and had an uneventful journey back to Madrid airport, arriving at 09.30, as planned. The **Black Kite** count en route totalled 15 birds!

Annotated List of Species Recorded

The focus for the trip was a target of new life species for Ed – of which 27 were seen – rather than aiming to see as many species as possible. Nevertheless an outstanding total of **163 species** was recorded.

1. **Little Grebe:** Seen on several days.
2. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen on all large bodies of water.
3. **Black-necked Grebe:** five at Alcollarín Reservoir on 24th April.
4. **Great Cormorant:** Seen at Arrocampo, Monfragüe and Alange.
5. **Little Bittern:** Males seen at Arrocampo and south of Madrigalejo.
6. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seven at Arrocampo, one at Alange and one from Roman Bridge, Mérida.
7. **Cattle Egret:** Seen most days with large numbers on rice fields.
8. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
9. **Great Egret:** One seen at Arrocampo and one at Tozo Reservoir.
10. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost every day.
11. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo, and singles near Zorita, Alcollarín and near Madrigalejo.
12. **Black Stork:** One seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and five at Monfragüe.
13. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
14. **Greater Flamingo.** 13 at the Torremejia lagoon on 25th April.
15. **Spoonbill:** Three at Tozo reservoir, 11 near Madrigalejo on 21st April and a total of 15 seen on 24th April.
16. **Grey Lag Goose:** One at Alcollarín Reservoir.
17. **Egyptian Goose:** Two at Tozo reservoir and six plus goslings at Alcollarín.
18. **Gadwall:** Seen on several days.
19. **Teal:** Two at Alcollarín reservoir on 24th April.
20. **Mallard:** Seen almost daily.
21. **Shoveler:** Small numbers seen on rice fields and at Alcollarín.
22. **Red-crested Pochard:** A pair near Madrigalejo and a drake near Zorita.
23. **Common Pochard:** Six at Tozo reservoir and 14 at Alcollarín.
24. **Shelduck:** One near Madrigalejo on 21st April and five at Alcollarín on 24th April.
25. **Black-winged Kite:** One near Arrocampo on 19th April and one near Madrigalejo on 21st April.
26. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
27. **Red Kite:** One seen at Arrocampo on 19th April and one near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April.
28. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen at Monfragüe and in Villuercas mountains.
29. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
30. **Black Vulture:** Seen on several days.
31. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen most days.
32. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen at Arrocampo, on rice fields and at Torremejia.
33. **Montagu's Harrier:** Eight seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April and two south of Mérida on 25th April.
34. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.

35. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** A juvenile near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April and two adults at Monfragüe on 22nd April.
36. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
37. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Three seen in Monfragüe on 22nd April.
38. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen almost daily, especially on plains.
39. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
40. **Peregrine Falcon:** One in Monfragüe on 22nd April.
41. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen most days.
42. **Quail:** Heard on rice fields.
43. **Water Rail:** One heard near Madrigalejo on 24th April.
44. **Moorhen:** Seen on several days.
45. **Purple Swamphen:** Nine seen at Arrocampo on 19th April.
46. **Common Coot:** Seen on several days.
47. **Red-knobbed Coot:** Two near Zorita on 24th April (one with neck collar and colour-rings).
48. **Little Bustard:** Three near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April and heard near Villafranca de los Barros on 25th April.
49. **Great Bustard:** Three males near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April.
50. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on several days.
51. **Avocet:** Nine near Madrigalejo on 21st April.
52. **Stone Curlew:** Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April, one flying over rice fields near Madrigalejo on 21st April and heard calling at Pago de San Clemente on evening of 24th April.
53. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen on both visits to the rice fields and also at the Torremejia lagoons.
54. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on both visits to rice fields with about 130 seen on 24th April.
55. **Little Ringed Plover:** One seen at Tozo reservoir, and small numbers present on rice fields.
56. **Kentish Plover:** Six plus two juveniles seen on rice fields on 21st April and five seen on 24th.
57. **Grey Plover:** Eight seen on rice fields on 21st April (one near Palazuelo and seven near Madrigalejo) and two at the latter site on 24th April.
58. **Northern Lapwing:** 12 and six seen near Madrigalejo on respective visits there.
59. **Turnstone:** One in summer plumage near Palazuelo on 24th April.
60. **Curlew Sandpiper:** Three near Madrigalejo on 24th April.
61. **Dunlin:** 150 seen on rice fields on 21st April and about 30 on 24th.
62. **Little Stint:** Three seen on both visits to rice fields near Madrigalejo.
63. **Ruff:** 15, including a breeding-plumage male near Madrigalejo on 21st April and a single male, also in breeding plumage there on 24th.
64. **Common Redshank:** 15 on rice fields on 21st and seven there on 24th. Two present at Torremejia on 25th April.
65. **Greenshank:** About six seen on both visits to rice fields.
66. **Wood Sandpiper:** Three seen on 21st and seven on 24th April near Madrigalejo.
67. **Common Sandpiper:** Three seen at Arrocampo on 19th April and six on 21st April on rice fields.
68. **Whimbrel:** Three near Madrigalejo on 24th April.
69. **Whiskered Tern:** Two near Palazuelo on 24th April.
70. **Black Tern:** An adult seen near Madrigalejo on 21st and 24th April.
71. **Gull-billed Tern:** seen at Arrocampo, on rice fields and Alange in good numbers.
72. **Black-headed Gull:** Small numbers on reservoirs and rice fields.
73. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Small numbers on reservoirs and rice fields.

74. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Twelve seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April and six on each of the visits to the rice fields.
75. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** At least six seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April.
76. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
77. **Wood Pigeon:** seen daily.
78. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
79. **Turtle Dove.** One seen on plains on 20th April and heard in Monfragüe.
80. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Two seen north of Trujillo on 20th April.
81. **Common Cuckoo:** Seen or heard almost daily.
82. **Scops Owl:** Heard on two evenings at Pago de San Clemente.
83. **Eagle Owl:** Adult seen in Monfragüe on 22nd April.
84. **Little Owl:** Four seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 20th April and seen at Pago de San Clemente.
85. **Long-eared Owl:** One seen in flight at Pago de San Clemente on 25th April.
86. **Red-necked Nightjar:** One seen in flight and heard calling at Pago de San Clemente on 25th April.
87. **Alpine Swift:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains and near Mérida.
88. **Common Swift:** Seen almost daily.
89. **Kingfisher.** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
90. **Bee-eater:** Seen daily.
91. **Roller:** Seen most days with nine seen on 20th April.
92. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
93. **Green Woodpecker:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
94. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard at Monfragüe and seen near Mérida.
95. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
96. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on plains and in ploughed areas on rice fields.
97. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
98. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
99. **Woodlark:** Seen near Tozo Reservoir.
100. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo and rice fields.
101. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
102. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
103. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
104. **House Martin:** seen daily.
105. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on both visits to the rice fields.
106. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on three days.
107. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Wren:** Seen or heard most days.
109. **Robin:** Seen on Villuercas Mountains.
110. **Nightingale:** Seen or heard daily.
111. **Black Redstart:** Seen in Monfragüe and the Villuercas Mountains.
112. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
113. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen on both visits to rice fields and near Villafranca de los Barros.
114. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Two seen on both visits to Sierra Brava and also in Monfragüe.
115. **Black Wheatear:** Two seen at Alange on 25th April.
116. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe and at Alange.
117. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
118. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen on several days.
119. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen or heard almost daily.
120. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen almost daily.
121. **Savi's Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo on 19th April.
122. **Sedge Warbler:** Seen on River Gargaligas on 21st April.

123. **Reed Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo and in Mérida.
124. **Great Reed Warbler:** Recorded at Arrocampo, on rivers in the rice fields and at Mérida.
125. **Melodious Warbler:** Two seen at Tozo and one singing near Madrigalejo.
126. **Dartford Warbler:** At least three seen near Jaraicejo on 22nd April.
127. **Spectacled Warbler:** At least three seen near Jaraicejo on 22nd April.
128. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo, the Villuercas and at Alange.
129. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen or heard on several days.
130. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Two seen near Jaraicejo on 22nd April.
131. **Blackcap:** Seen on several days.
132. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** Two in Villuercas Mountains on 23rd April.
133. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on several days.
134. **Crested Tit:** One seen in Villuercas Mountains on 23rd April.
135. **Blue Tit:** Seen daily.
136. **Great Tit:** Seen daily.
137. **Nuthatch:** Seen in Monfragüe and the Villuercas Mountains.
138. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen in Monfragüe and the Villuercas Mountains.
139. **Penduline Tit:** Male nest-building in Merida on 25th April.
140. **Golden Oriole:** Male seen in Monfragüe and heard near Mérida.
141. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
142. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
143. **Jay:** Seen in Monfragüe and the Villuercas Mountains.
144. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
145. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
146. **Red-billed Chough:** Two seen in Villuercas Mountains.
147. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
148. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
149. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
150. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
151. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
152. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on both visits to the rice fields.
153. **Rock Sparrow:** about five seen in Monfragüe.
154. **Common Waxbill:** About 12 seen in rice fields on 21st April.
155. **Red Avadavat:** seen on both visits to the rice fields.
156. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
157. **Serin.** Seen most days.
158. **Greenfinch.** Seen on two days.
159. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost every day.
160. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
161. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
162. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe and the Villuercas Mountains.
163. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.