

## Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

### REPORT ON SPRING HOLIDAY FOR FRANK WHALLAM'S GROUP

#### Itinerary (21<sup>st</sup> March – 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015)

**21<sup>st</sup> March 2015:** Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo with stop at Arrocampo Reservoir

**22<sup>nd</sup> March 2015:** Exploring the plains between Trujillo and Santa Marta de Magasca

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015:** Plains of Campo Lugar, Alcollarín Reservoir, Palazuelo rice fields, Casas del Hito and Sierra Brava Reservoir

**24<sup>th</sup> March 2015:** South of Madrigalejo with Gargaligas River, Moheda Alta, Orellana Reservoir, Puerto Peña and Casas del Hito.

**25<sup>th</sup> March 2015:** Santa Marta de Magasca, Monfragüe National Park and Belén Plains.

**26<sup>th</sup> March 2015:** Santa Marta de Magasca, Jaraicejo heath, Puerto de Miravete, River Almonte, Trujillo

**27<sup>th</sup> March 2015:** Arrocampo reservoir, Valdecañas and return to Madrid

#### Trip Report

##### Day 1: 21<sup>st</sup> March 2015: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo with stop at Arrocampo Reservoir

Frank, Kerrie, Steph, Brian and Jack were met by Martin at the Ibis Hotel Barajas just after midday and we set off on the ring-road around the southern edge of Madrid before heading on to the motorway for the journey south-westwards to Extremadura. We stopped about fifty kilometres from the city for lunch at a typical Spanish bar, with a man selling lottery tickets helping with the seating arrangements. After lunch we took advantage of a few minutes before recommencing the journey to find **Corn Bunting** close to the car park, but pride of place was watching an **Osprey** and **Red Kite** flying together overhead.

As we entered Extremadura we starting seeing more birds: **Red Kites**, **White Storks** and **Common Kestrels**. We had time to make a short stop at the Arrocampo Reservoir, a wonderful reed and *Typha*-fringed site, thanks to constant water levels, as the reservoir provides water for the adjacent power station. We stayed at one place the entire stay, watching a party of **Spoonbill** (and with one flying over as well) and **Purple Herons**, whilst a **Savi's Warbler** sang almost non-stop.

We reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo just after 17.30, with Claudia there to welcome us. Frank had a wonderful view of a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** in the tree in front of his room, whilst listening to the evening song of a **Blackbird**.

##### Day 2: 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2015: Exploring the plains between Trujillo and Santa Marta de Magasca

It was a generally overcast day with a fresh northerly wind, which gave us a few sunny spells. Miraculously we escaped rain. We spent the day on the plains to the west of Trujillo, making an initial stop to take a very pleasant walk along an old drovers' trail. This gave us an ideal opportunity to study the local larks, including **Crested**, **Thekla**, **Calandra** and **Skylarks**. Whilst scanning the open country we found a party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** on the ground, looking initially like a collection of brown stones. A distant **Short-toed Eagle** drifted to the west of us, and we also saw both **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** and **Red** and **Black Kites**. **Corn Buntings** were abundant, and we enjoyed good views of **Iberian Grey Shrikes**.

We paused for coffee at the edge of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, and were delighted to have a sighting of **Hawfinch** in a nearby tree and **Spanish Sparrows**. We then headed briefly southwards and came across a party of **Great Bustards**, including a fine displaying male, which had us enthralled for many minutes. On a nearby pool were a **Snipe** and two **Black-winged Stilts**. We watched male **Lesser Kestrels** visiting the newly erected nestboxes on poles beside the road, whilst a **Northern Wheatear** was spotted in the field below. Returning past the village we stopped for lunch beside the Magasca River. At this tranquil spot **Serins** were singing and a nice procession of birds of prey passed over including vultures and kites, but pride of place was an adult **Golden Eagle** which even initiated some sky-dance display.

Returning to the plains, we found a party of **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** beside a carcass of a sheep and it was fascinating watching the interactions between them. A little further along, we took a short walk, again watching larks and also a female **Hen Harrier**, appearing quite bulky in shape.



As we returned to Trujillo, we saw **Azure-winged Magpies** and we made a spot to admire how **White Storks** had taken over an old water mill and an abandoned house. We concluded the afternoon enjoying the sight of **Lesser Kestrels** and **Spotless Starlings** around the Bull Ring at Trujillo.



**Day 3: 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015: Plains of Campo Lugar, Alcollarín Reservoir, Palazuelo rice fields, Casas del Hito and Sierra Brava Reservoir**

The skies were threatening throughout the day, but we avoided rain until a dramatic end to the day with a thunderstorm which left drifts of hailstones beside the road.

We headed south to the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. Here we were fortunate enough to get outstanding views of displaying **Great Bustards**, seeing at least 70 birds during the space of an hour or so. We also found no fewer than five **Little Owls** on piles of stones across the landscape.

Following coffee we visited the new reservoir of Alcollarín. This was a great place with a wide variety of duck present including a pair of **Garganey**, **Red-crested Pochard**, a fine drake **Pintail**, as well as a **Glossy Ibis** (the latter three species being found by the eagle-eyed Steph and Kerrie). We had lunch in woodland beside a small weir which attracted a nice collection of **Great** and

**Little Egrets. Chiffchaffs** foraged and we had magnificent views of a **Kingfisher**.



From there we spent the afternoon crossing the rice fields, almost all of which were dry and rather unproductive, until we reached one with a small selection of waders including **Common Redshank** and **Ruff**. We stopped beside the River Ruercas and obtained good views of a lock of **Red Avadavats**. By the end of the afternoon, the weather broke, with a dramatic thunderstorm, followed by a wonderful rainbow over the Sierra Brava reservoir, with its storm-tossed waves.

**Day 4: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015: South of Madrigalejo with Gargaligas River, Moheda Alta, Orellana Reservoir, Puerto Peña and Casas del Hito.**

It was another rather overcast day, but staying dry. Before we set off, some members of the group saw a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** not far from the house. Today we ventured south again, this time beyond the town of Madrigalejo and eastwards. We paid an initial visit to the Gargaligas River where **Cetti's Warblers** were singing and a **White Stork** had a nest full of sparrows as tenants, and then stopped at the Crane Information Centre at Moheda Alta. Here we have good view of a **Black-winged Kite**, perched and in flight, offering us a chance to see its delicate hovering action. **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were also present.



After coffee, we then visited a bay of the Orellana Reservoir where we found a first-winter **Little Gull** amongst the **Black-headed Gulls** present. But what was most delightful about the place was the large number of **Black-necked Grebes**, some already in full breeding plumage. A pair of **Red-crested Pochard** was also present as were a few waders such as **Greenshank** and **Common Sandpiper**. Whilst there both a pale-phase and a dark-phase **Booted Eagle** glided over.

Lunch was taken at the superb viewpoint of Puerto Peña, looking across to a massive rock face where there were breeding **Griffon Vultures**. Other birds appeared, including **Bonelli's Eagle**, **Black Stork**, **Egyptian Vultures** and a pair of air-tumbling **Red-billed Choughs**.

In the afternoon we returned to the rice fields, first of all near the village of Vegas Altas (where we saw **Black Redstart** and **Zitting Cisticola**) and Casas del Hito, where **Common Redshank** and **Snipe** were present in the pools where we had seen them the day before. Rain again concluded the afternoon at our stop beside the Sierra Brava Reservoir, but we managed to see a **Sparrowhawk**, as well as three **Iberian Hares** and a party of **Great Bustard**.

**Day 5: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015: Santa Marta de Magasca, Monfragüe National Park and Belén Plains.**

The clouds had cleared and it remained a fine sunny day throughout, but marked by a rather bitter northerly wind, which was quite fierce at times. We made a brief stop on the plains west of Trujillo, but failing to find either Little Bustard or Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, we then headed directly to the Monfragüe

National Park. We made our first stop in the north of the park, beside the Tiétar River, overlooking a fine rock face. Here there were many pairs of **Griffon Vulture**, some with chicks in the nest. However, our sought-for species, the **Spanish Imperial Eagle** proved more elusive until after we had had coffee, when on our return to the viewpoint, a bird appeared from the east (the phrase “it is to the left of the Moon” was uttered!) and came in low, making an abortive mobbing attack on a vulture before drifting off. The light was superb, allowing us a good opportunity to see the distinctive plumage features of this raptor.

We then stopped for lunch at the Tajadilla viewpoint, where we enjoyed good views of **Hawfinches**, as well as **Egyptian Vultures** and **Azure-winged Magpies**. Finally at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint in the south of the park we stopped and despite the very strong gusts of wind, managed to get good views of **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Stork**, as well as the ubiquitous **Griffon Vultures**.

We completed the afternoon with a drive across the Belén Plains, where good numbers of **Corn Buntings** and **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were seen.

#### **Day 6: 26<sup>th</sup> March 2015: Santa Marta de Magasca, Jaraicejo heath, Puerto de Miravete, River Almonte, Trujillo**

The overcast conditions returned and it became steadily windier through the day, but it remained dry. We returned to the plains west of Trujillo where we were delighted to have superb views of about 15 **Little Bustards**, including several males in full breeding plumage. A little bit further on we also found a party of about 40 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. We then took a circuit back towards Trujillo, stopping to get memorable views of a pair of **Montagu’s Harriers** (which was our 21<sup>st</sup> bird of prey seen), as well as a close fly-by of a female **Merlin** and two male **Little Bustards** pursuing each other in flight.

A flock of sheep with young lambs attracted a group of **Red** and **Black Kites**, as well as a few **Griffon Vultures**, presumably because of the presence of afterbirth following the lambing. We had coffee north of Trujillo, where we saw a fine **Booted Eagle** flying overhead.

We then walked on an area of heathland near Jaraicejo, descending into a cork oak grove. The wind had increased making it rather difficult to find small birds, but we did get good views of **Dartford Warbler** and a **Black Stork**. We had our picnic beside the Arroyo de la Vid, where Kerrie and Steph had good views of a male **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. We then continued north to walk in the pines at the Miravete Pass and watching an obliging **Crested Tit** and a pair of **Woodlark**. We paused at the River Almonte, where a **Short-toed Eagle** and **Green Sandpiper** were seen.

By the time we reached Trujillo late afternoon the sun had come out and we had a pleasant walk around the historic centre of the town, going up to the fort, before completing our visit with drinks in the Main Square as **Lesser Kestrels** glided overhead.



**Day 7: 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015: Arrocampo reservoir, Valdecañas and return to Madrid**



For the last day of the holiday the weather had changed dramatically, with warm sunshine and hardly a breath of wind. After taking our leave of Claudia at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we set off shortly after 09.00 and went straight to the Arrocampo Reservoir. Here we spent most of the day and highly rewarding it was too. As well as a similar cast of herons and egrets as on the first visit, we also got good views of **Little Bittern**, a close **Penduline Tit**, several **Savi's Warblers**, a feeding **Jack Snipe** and perhaps best of all an absolutely gorgeous male **Bluethroat** with a white spot that had an extraordinary brilliance. Added to that were **Glossy Ibis**, **Purple Swamphen**, displaying **Marsh Harriers** and very smart **Yellow Wagtails**.



We had a brief stop at woodland near the Valdecañas Dam, which gave us a chance to see **Griffon Vultures** and a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles**, plus good views of **Short-toed Treecreeper** and **Hawfinches** (a species that has featured well this week).

Just after 16.00 we headed off to Madrid, reaching the airport at about 18.30, in good time for the check-in for the flight home.

### **Annotated List of Birds Seen**

Despite the generally windy conditions, which were hugely unfavourable for seeing small birds and a rather poor wader passage, we recorded a group total of 143 species. Of particular note was the outstanding total of 21 birds of prey and a good selection of duck.

1. **Wigeon**: About six present at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.



2. **Gadwall:** Seen at Alcollarín, Arrocampo and Orellana Reservoirs.
3. **Mallard:** Seen every day.
4. **Pintail:** A male at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
5. **Garganey:** A pair at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
6. **Shoveler:** Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana Reservoirs.
7. **Red-crested Pochard:** A pair at Alcollarín on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and at Orrellana on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
8. **Common Pochard:** About 30 at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
9. **Shelduck:** Two at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
10. **Egyptian Goose:** One at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
11. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on several days.
12. **Quail:** Heard at Casas del Hito on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
13. **Little Grebe:** Seen on several days.
14. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and at Orellana on 24<sup>th</sup>.
15. **Black-necked Grebe:** About 20 at Orellana Reservoir on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
16. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on most days.
17. **Little Bittern:** Two seen at Arrocampo Reservoir on 27<sup>th</sup> March and a female briefly on Ruercas River on 23<sup>rd</sup>.
18. **Cattle Egret:** Seen daily.
19. **Little Egret:** Seen almost every day.
20. **Great Egret:** Seen at Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
21. **Grey Heron:** Seen daily.
22. **Purple Heron:** Seen on both visits to Arrocampo.
23. **Black Stork:** Seen on several occasions, including River Magasca, Puerto Peña. Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
24. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
25. **Glossy Ibis:** One at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and one at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup>.
26. **Spoonbill:** Six at Arrocampo on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 6 at Alcollarín reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and three at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup>.
27. **Osprey:** One over motorway outside Madrid on 21<sup>st</sup> March.
28. **Black-winged Kite:** One at Moheda Alta on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
29. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
30. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
31. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen at Puerto Peña and Monfragüe.
32. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
33. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
34. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen on most days.
35. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost every day.
36. **Hen Harrier:** One female north of Aldea del Obispo on 22<sup>nd</sup> March.
37. **Montagu's Harrier:** A pair north of Santa Marta de Magasca on 26<sup>th</sup> March.
38. **Sparrowhawk:** One at Sierra Brava Reservoir on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
39. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
40. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** A pair seen displaying distantly north of Aldea del Obispo on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and one seen well at Monfragüe on 25<sup>th</sup>.
41. **Golden Eagle:** A displaying adult over River Magasca on 22<sup>nd</sup> March.
42. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost every day. All pale phase birds, apart from one dark phase at Orellana Reservoir on 24<sup>th</sup> March.

43. **Bonelli's Eagle:** One at Puerto Peña on 24<sup>th</sup> March and two at Valdecañas on 27<sup>th</sup> March.
44. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen daily.
45. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
46. **Merlin:** One at Moheda Alta on 24<sup>th</sup> March and one north of Santa Marta de Magasca on 26<sup>th</sup> March. Both females.
47. **Peregrine:** Seen at Alcollarín on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and at Puerto Peña on 24<sup>th</sup>.
48. **Water Rail:** One seen at Arrocampo on 21<sup>st</sup> March and heard on several occasions.
49. **Moorhen:** Seen on several days.
50. **Common Coot:** Seen on several days.
51. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
52. **Little Bustard:** 15 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 26<sup>th</sup> March with two males seen later that morning to the north.
53. **Great Bustard:** About 30 seen south of Santa Marta de Magasca on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and over 70 near Campo Lugar on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Displaying males seen on both occasions.
54. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on several days.
55. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March and also near Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup>.
56. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and on rice fields on 23<sup>rd</sup>.
57. **Ruff:** Five on rice fields near Casas del Hito on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
58. **Jack Snipe:** One at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup> March.
59. **Common Snipe:** Seen at Arrocampo and on rice fields as well as pool near Santa Marta de Magasca.
60. **Common Redshank:** Heard at Arrocampo on 21<sup>st</sup> March and single figures present on rice fields on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March.
61. **Greenshank:** Five at Orellana Reservoir on 24<sup>th</sup> March and seen also on Belén Plains on 25<sup>th</sup>.
62. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on several days.
63. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Orellana Reservoir on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
64. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana reservoirs and on the rice fields.
65. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen at the reservoirs and rice fields.
66. **Little Gull:** One first winter bird at Orellana Reservoir on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
67. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** 12 seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 22<sup>nd</sup> March.
68. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** about 40 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 26<sup>th</sup> March.
69. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
70. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
71. **Collared Dove:** seen daily.
72. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** One seen briefly from Madrid on 21<sup>st</sup> March.
73. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard almost every day and a couple of sightings as well.
74. **Scops Owl:** Heard in the evenings at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
75. **Little Owl:** Five seen on plains near Campo Lugar on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
76. **Alpine Swift:** Several feeding over Orellana Reservoir on 24<sup>th</sup> March.

77. **Common/Pallid Swift:** A couple of brief sightings of dark swifts could have been either of these two species.
78. **Kingfisher:** Seen well at Alcollarín on 23<sup>rd</sup> March with several other sightings during the week.
79. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
80. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Calling and drumming in Monfragüe on 25<sup>th</sup> March.
81. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen near Casa Rural El Recuerdo and near Jaraicejo.
82. **Calandra Lark.** Common on plains west of Trujillo and near Campo Lugar.
83. **Crested Lark.** Seen daily.
84. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on most days on palisn and also near Jaraicejo.
85. **Woodlark:** Singing near Santa Marta de Magasca, Orellana Reservoir and at the Miravete Pass, where seen well on 26<sup>th</sup> March.
86. **Skylark:** Small flock of about 15 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 22<sup>nd</sup> March.
87. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo, near Santa Marta de Magasca and the Orellana Reservoir.
88. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost every day.
89. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
90. **Red-rumped Swallow:** seen most days.
91. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
92. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
93. **Water Pipit:** Two or three at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup> March.
94. **Yellow Wagtail:** Three seen at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup> March.
95. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
96. **Robin:** Seen most days.
97. **Bluethroat:** Two seen at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup> March.
98. **Black Redstart:** Seen at Vegas Altas and at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
99. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
100. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen on several days.
101. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe, in Trujillo and near Jaraicejo.
102. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
103. **Song Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe on 25<sup>th</sup> March and several at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup> March.
104. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen on a couple of days.
105. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded daily.
106. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen almost daily.
107. **Savi's Warbler:** Several present at Arrocampo on both visits.
108. **Sedge Warbler:** Several present at Arrocampo on both visits.
109. **Dartford Warbler:** seen at Jaraicejo on 26<sup>th</sup> March.
110. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen briefly in Monfragüe and near Jaraicejo.
111. **Sardinian Warbler:** Heard and seen briefly on several days.
112. **Blackcap:** Seen on several days.
113. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen daily.
114. **Willow Warbler:** Recorded at Alcollarín on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and at Jaraicejo on 26<sup>th</sup>.

115. **Wren:** Seen or heard almost daily.
116. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at Monfragüe.
117. **Crested Tit:** Seen at Miravete Pass on 26<sup>th</sup> March.
118. **Blue Tit:** Seen daily.
119. **Great Tit:** Seen daily.
120. **Bearded Tit:** Seen briefly at Arrocampo on 21<sup>st</sup> March and heard on 27<sup>th</sup>.
121. **Nuthatch:** Heard in Monfragüe and near Jaraicejo.
122. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen near Valdecañas Dam.
123. **Penduline Tit:** One seen at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup> March.
124. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
125. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
126. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
127. **Red-billed Chough:** A pair at Puerto Peña on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
128. **Jackdaw:** Seen daily.
129. **Raven:** Seen daily.
130. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
131. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
132. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen daily.
133. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen in rice fields.
134. **Common Waxbill:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
135. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
136. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
137. **Serin:** Seen daily.
138. **Greenfinch:** Seen on several days.
139. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
140. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
141. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Santa Marta de Magasca, Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
142. **Reed Bunting:** One at Arrocampo on 27<sup>th</sup> March.
143. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.