

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR GILL, BRENDA, PETER AND PAUL

Casa Rural El Recuerdo & Birding Extremadura

10th - 17th May 2017



Itinerary

10th May 2017: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

11th May 2017: Plains of Campo Lugar and Sierra Brava, the area near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, Palazuelo and Alcollarín

12th May 2017: Exploring the plains west of Trujillo

13th May 2017: Plains of Campo Lugar and Sierra Brava, River Ruercas and Alcollarín Reservoir

14th May 2017: Heath and cork oak groves of Jaraicejo, Miravete Pass, Cabañas del Castillo, Belén Plains

15th May 2017: Monfragüe National Park

16th May 2017: Rice fields near Fernando V, Almendralejo, Guadiana River near Lobón, Roman Bridge Mérida and Guadiana River near Don Benito

17th May 2017: Monfragüe National Park, Arrocampo Reservoir, Valdecañas valley and return to Madrid.

TOUR REPORT

10th May 2017: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Martin met Gill, Brenda, Peter and Paul at Terminal One at Madrid Airport at about 21.00 and despite stormy weather we had a good run from the airport, around the southern side of Madrid and on to the A5 motorway for Extremadura. We had a single stop to stretch our legs just after entering Extremadura and arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo before midnight.

11th May 2017: Plains of Campo Lugar and Sierra Brava, the area near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, Palazuelo and Alcollarín

It was an unsettled day, with strong winds, heavy showers and storms always threatening. We headed south, onto the edge of the plains of Campo Lugar where we had excellent views of a displaying **Great Bustard** to a constant sound backdrop of **Calandra Larks**. **Lesser Kestrels** hovered in groups over the grasslands. We continued onto the Sierra Brava reservoir and then onto the rice fields near Madrigalejo. A lot of the fields were in the process of being flooded and we saw **Black-winged Stilts** on several of them. Driving through some holm oak *dehesa* behind the village of Vegas Altas, we had good views of several **Bee-eaters**. After coffee at the Moheda Alta complex, where there was a group of 17 **Spoonbill** feeding on a pool, we visited a small dam where we saw our first **Collared Pratincoles**, as well as a selection of waders including **Kentish**, **Ringed** and **Little Ringed Plovers**, **Avocet** and more **Black-winged Stilts**.

We had lunch at the Moheda Alta picnic site, watching **Hoopoes** and listening to **Quail**.

Our next stop was beside the river Gargáligas, where we had good views of a **Great Reed Warbler** and took in the sound of several **Nightingales** in song. Glimpses were had of **Golden Oriole** too.

We then drove through the rice-growing area near Palazuelo, finding a **Lapwing**, more **Black-winged Stilts** and a couple of **Kentish Plover**. On our return home, we dropped in to take a brief look at the Alcollarín Reservoir, where there were large numbers of **Great Crested Grebe**, but the inclement weather encouraged us not to dally there.

12th May 2017: Exploring the plains west of Trujillo

The skies looked even blacker today, but miraculously we escaped most of the heavy showers. The below-average temperatures made a day on the open plains seem

especially attractive, to be able to watch birds without undue heat shimmer. Thus at our first stop we were able to watch both **Pin-tailed** and **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** on the ground, even though they were a good distance away. The dramatic sky provided a perfect and vivid backdrop to a male **Montagu's Harrier** which quartered the open terrain. A **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was seen far more distantly.

After coffee, we drove along the road to the village of Santa Marta de Magasca where thanks to the provision of nest boxes we had wonderful views of **Rollers**, as well as **Lesser Kestrel**. Pausing at the River Tamuja, we did not have to wait long before getting a brilliantly close view of a **Bonelli's Eagle** passing over head. Below us, along the river we enjoyed watching **Bee-eaters**, as well as **Crag Martin** and **House Martin**.

We found an excellent covered picnic area next to the village and then we spent some time on the plains north of the village. Here we had more sightings of **Montagu's Harrier**, found a displaying **Little Bustard** and two **Great Bustards**, quietly feeding in the long grass. A **Little Owl** delightfully sat on a stone wall for us to enjoy.



Returning towards the village we were thrilled with a low-passing **Golden Eagle**, which flew through the trees on a *dehesa* slope, appearing to dwarf a bull feeding below it!

After more **Rollers** in view, we stopped to look at **Short-toed** and **Calandra Larks** before then returning home, via a stop in Madroñera to search in vain for Scops Owl.

13th May 2017: Plains of Campo Lugar and Sierra Brava, River Ruercas and Alcollarín Reservoir

The stormy weather had moved on, giving us a day of generally overcast conditions with a fresh westerly wind. We visited first the Sierra Brava reservoir, where we had good views of both **Common** and **Lesser Kestrel**. From there we stopped at the River Ruercas, where in the willow shrubby riverine vegetation we had lovely views of **Melodious Warbler**, **Golden Oriole** and **Common Waxbill**. We were surrounded by the sound of **Nightingales**, **Cetti's Warblers** and **Great Reed Warblers**. We then crossed the Campo Lugar plains, seeing **Calandra Larks**, **Crested Larks** and **Rollers**, and a very fine **Short-toed Eagle**.

We stopped for coffee outside the village of Campo Lugar, watching **House Martins** and **Lesser Kestrels** nesting on the old grain silo. Peter and Paul savoured the local delicacy of pig's ears.

Onward to the Alcollarín Reservoir where we sat and watched a delightful colony of **Bee-eaters**, with a **Rock Sparrow** also present at their colony. We had lunch at the picnic area, where a **Great Reed Warbler** serenaded us continuously, sometimes from a fence post. A party of **Spoonbill** fed actively at the edge of the water and a brood of **Great Crested Grebes** were present as well. **Woodchat Shrikes** perched on the trees beside us. A **Lulworth Skipper** was one of the few butterflies on the wing.



As we progressed around the reservoir, we had several good views of **Thekla Lark**. We completed our visit with a walk through the flower-rich meadow beside the western side of the reservoir. **Little Ringed Plovers** called from the shore. Amongst the **Mallard** we found a **Red-crested Pochard** and four **Black-necked Grebe**, whilst above our heads were a pair of **Booted Eagles** and much higher up two **Black Stork**.

14th May 2017: Heath and cork oak groves of Jaraicejo, Miravete Pass, Cabañas del Castillo, Belén Plains



The weather had changed and we awoke to clear skies and calm conditions. As we left, we could hear an **Iberian Green Woodpecker** calling from the other side of the village, whilst a **Wren** sang from the top of a tree in the drive.

We drove north-east for twenty minutes, stopping first on the beautiful heath above Jaraicejo. This is a lavender and broom dominated landscape, skirted by cork oak groves. We very quickly found **Dartford Warbler** and it was not long before we also had obtained good views of **Spectacled Warbler**. **Thekla Larks** were abundant, as were the ubiquitous **Corn Buntings**. We walked into a cork oak grove, where we found

Short-toed Treecreeper, as well as **Subalpine Warblers**. Close by, near the Arroyo de la Vid, we eventually got good views of **Western Orphean Warbler**, and more easily **Crag Martins** and **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Nuthatch**.

After coffee, we stopped at the Miravete Pass for our picnic. A **Girl Bunting** was singing at length from a perch in view and after lunch Gill found a **Woodlark** which sat perched obligingly on top of a telegraph post.

We then headed east to the Villuercas Mountains. We made a brief stop at the point where the River Almonte cuts a massive gorge through the western ridge of the range, before stopping at Cabañas del Castillo for a wonderful walk to view the valley behind the village. Three species of swift were seen: **Alpine**, **Common** and a pair of **White-rumped**. **Black Redstart** and **Blue Rock Thrush** were seen well, a **Rock Bunting** more distantly. We then returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo across the *dehesas* near Aldeacentenera and across the Belén Plains, where we had views of **Short-toed Eagles**, **Bee-eaters** and numerous larks and **Corn Buntings**.

15th May 2017: Monfragüe National Park

It was a fine day with high cloud and little wind. We drove north through the seemingly endless expanse of *dehesa* landscape, crossing the Tozo and Almonte Rivers to enter the Monfragüe National Park. We stopped first at the castle ridge, taking a walk through the ridge-top woodland, affording magnificent views across the countryside and leading to the castle. There we had excellent views of **White-rumped Swift**, as well as passing **Griffon Vultures**. A **Rock Bunting** sang from a crag and **Hawfinches** were seen briefly in flight.

From there we drove across to the north of the park where we had coffee at the edge of a cork oak grove, with a **Booted Eagle** gliding overhead. We walked at the edge of the woodland, hearing **Golden Orioles** and **Western Orphean Warblers**.

At the Portilla del Tiétar rock face we had sightings of **Subalpine Warbler**, more **Griffon Vultures**, a **Black Stork** and heard the barking call of **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. Nearby we could admire a nesting **Egyptian Vulture**.

Our picnic was at the edge of a pine wood overlooking the Tiétar River, after which we took a walk beside the Tagus Riiver, where a family of **Long-tailed Tits** were active and **Alpine Swifts** chattered overhead. **Nettle-tree Butterflies** and **Large Tortoiseshells** were seen there.

We complete our visit at the massive rock of Peña Falcon. There we had superb views of **White-rumped Swift**, as well as **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Bunting** and **Black Redstart**. **Griffon Vultures** descended to land on the rock face, whilst a **Black Stork** was watched feeding her three chicks.

16th May 2017: Rice fields near Fernando V, Almendralejo, Guadiana River near Lobón, Roman Bridge Mérida and Guadiana River near Don Benito

A much warmer day today, with the temperatures rising to the low thirties. We headed south with a stop first at the rice fields near to Fernando V where we watched **Collared Pratincoles** and **Black-winged Stilts**. We then drove south of Mérida, entering the vast Tierra de Barros landscape, dominated by vines and olives. We met with the Urban Birder David Lindo and he joined us for the search for **Rufous Bush Robin**. It was not too long before we heard one singing and managed to get excellent views of it.

We then drove to an area of river habitat beside the Guadiana River where we searched for **Isabelline Warbler**. This was harder work but eventually we got brief views of a bird that had been calling and singing intermediately. **Melodious Warbler** and **Golden Oriole** were also present there.

We then moved to Mérida for a picnic beside the Guadiana River followed by a walk on the Roman Bridge. We had excellent views of **Glossy Ibis** and a good range of heron species including **Little Bittern**, **Black-crowned Night Heron** and **Purple Heron**. But best of all were the prolonged and close views of three species of swift: **Alpine**, **Common** and **Pallid**.

We made a final stop beside the Guadiana River near Don Benito to look for Isabelline Warbler, without success, but we saw **Melodious Warbler**, **Nightingales**, **Common Waxbills** and **Kingfisher**.

17th May 2017: Monfragüe National Park, Arrocampo Reservoir, Valdecañas valley and return to Madrid.

We set off from Casa Rural El Recuerdo to a bright morning, with high cloud and a refreshing breeze, although the temperatures built up during the day. We made our first stop back at the castle of Monfragüe to take in the magnificent views and enjoy again the **White-rumped Swifts**, this time accompanied by **Common** and **Alpine Swifts**. Vultures passed at eye-level and we saw again **Rock Bunting** singing and **Subalpine Warbler**. We then drove through the park, stopping at the Portilla de Tiétar where we were delighted to get prolonged views of a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** perched high on the rock face.

A coffee stop was then due, so we returned to the friendly bar set in the cork oak woodland, where as we sipped our drinks on the terrace we were well rewarded by magnificent sight of a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** enjoying the first thermals of the day.

From there is was a relatively short drive to the village of Saucedilla and we roamed on the hinterland of irrigated pasture and small pools, finding three **Glossy Ibis**, as well as many **Bee-eaters**, a **Purple Heron** and two delightful **Squacco Heron**.



We then spent the rest of the time available on the eastern shore of the Arrocampo Reservoir, finding a **Savi's Warbler**, seeing a group of **Black-crowned Night Heron**, and **Purple Swamphen**.

A brief stop was made in the Valdecañas valley nearby to finalise packing and get glimpses of **Hawfinch**. **Nightingales** continued to serenade us. Then it was a stop half way on the journey for a late lunch and then a smooth run through to the airport which we reached at 18.30 for an easy check-in for the Easyjet flight.

Annotated List

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín.
2. **Gadwall**: Seen on pool near Santa Marta de Magasca and at Alcollarín.
3. **Mallard**: Seen daily.
4. **Red-crested Pochard**: One male at Alcollarín on 13th May.
5. **Shelduck**: One near Palazuelo on 11th May.
6. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on plains.
7. **Quail**: Heard on two days.
8. **Little Grebe**: Seen on four days.
9. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarín.
10. **Black-necked Grebe**: Four at Alcollarín on 13th May.
11. **Great Cormorant**: Seen on several days.
12. **Little Bittern**: Seen at River Ruercas on 13th May, at Mérida and near Don Benito on 16th and at Arrocampo on 17th May.

13. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen at Merida and Arrocampo.
14. **Squacco Heron:** Two near Arrocampo on 17th May.
15. **Cattle Egret:** Seen almost daily.
16. **Little Egret:** Seen almost daily.
17. **Great Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
18. **Grey Heron:** Seen daily.
19. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Merida and Arrocampo.
20. **Black Stork:** Seen on four days, with views of nesting birds at Monfragüe.
21. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
22. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Roman Bridge, Mérida and near Arrocampo.
23. **Spoonbill:** 17 at Moheda Alta on 11th May, 18 at Alcollarín on 13th May and also over Roman Bridge, Mérida.
24. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen in Monfragüe.
25. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
26. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 12th May and also seen in Monfragüe National Park on 17th.
28. **Golden Eagle:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 12th May.
29. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
30. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
31. **Bonelli's Eagle:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 12th May.
32. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
33. **Red Kite:** See almost daily.
34. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
35. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 12th May.
36. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
37. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
38. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
39. **Peregrine Falcon:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo and Monfragüe.
40. **Moorhen:** Seen on several days.
41. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
42. **Common Coot:** Seen on large water bodies.
43. **Little Bustard:** One bird in display near Santa Marta de Magasca on 12th May.
44. **Great Bustard:** Seen in display near Campo Lugar on 11th May and also seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
45. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on several days.
46. **Avocet:** Two at Moheda Alta on 11th May.
47. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen on rice fields and Alcollarín on 11th, 13th and 16th May.
48. **Ringed Plover:** Seen at Moheda Alta on 11th May.
49. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields and Alcollarín.
50. **Kentish Plover:** Seen at Moheda Alta and Palazuelo on 11th May.
51. **Northern Lapwing:** One at Palazuelo on 11th May.

52. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Moheda Alta on 11th May and Fernando V on 16th.
53. **Gull-billed Tern:** One at Fernando V on 13th May.
54. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on several days.
55. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on 11th May.
56. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains on 12th May.
57. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains on 12th May.
58. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
59. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
60. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
61. **Turtle Dove:** Heard on 14th May at Jaraicejo.
62. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard/seen daily.
63. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains on 12th May.
64. **Alpine Swift:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains, Monfragüe and Mérida.
65. **Common Swift:** Seen daily.
66. **Pallid Swift:** Seen in Mérida.
67. **White-rumped Swift:** Seen in Monfragüe, Villuercas Mountains and Miravete Pass.
68. **Kingfisher:** Seen on several days.
69. **Bee-eater:** Seen every day.
70. **Roller:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca, Madrigalejo and Campo Lugar.
71. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
72. **Iberian Green Woodpecker:** Calling at Pago de San Clemente on 14th May.
73. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard on three days.
74. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente on 11th May and heard on 16th.
75. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
76. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on plains.
77. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
78. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
79. **Woodlark:** Seen at Moheda Alta and Miravete Pass.
80. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Mérida.
81. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
82. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
83. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
84. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
85. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains on 14th May.
86. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
87. **Wren:** Seen almost daily.
88. **Robin:** Recorded in Monfragüe and Valdecañas valley.
89. **Nightingale:** Seen daily.
90. **Rufous Bush Robin:** Seen near Almendralejo on 16th May.
91. **Black Redstart:** Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas.

92. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily.
93. **Black-eared Wheatear**: Seen near Almendralejo on 16th May.
94. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Monfragüe and Cabañas del Castillo.
95. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
96. **Song Thrush**: Seen on three days.
97. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen in Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
98. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded almost every day.
99. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen almost daily.
100. **Savi's Warbler**: Singing at Arrocampo on 17th May.
101. **Reed Warbler**: Seen/heard almost daily.
102. **Great Reed Warbler**: Seen/heard on several days.
103. **Melodious Warbler**: Seen on three days.
104. **Isabelline Warbler**: Seen near Mérida on 16th May.
105. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen at Jaraicejo on 14th May.
106. **Spectacled Warbler**:
107. **Subalpine Warbler**: Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
108. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
109. **Western Orphean Warbler**: Seen at Jaraicejo on 14th May.
110. **Blackcap**: Seen almost daily.
111. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on three days.
112. **Crested Tit**: Recorded at Jaraicejo on 14th May.
113. **Blue Tit**: Seen on a few days.
114. **Great Tit**: Seen almost daily.
115. **Nuthatch**: Calling at Jaraicejo and Monfragüe.
116. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Recorded on several days with sightings at Jaraicejo.
117. **Penduline Tit**: Heard at Mérida on 16th May.
118. **Golden Oriole**: Seen on several days.
119. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
120. **Woodchat Shrike**: Seen daily.
121. **Jay**: Seen at Jaraicejo and Monfragüe.
122. **Azure-winged Magpie**: Seen daily.
123. **Magpie**: Seen daily.
124. **Jackdaw**: Seen on several days.
125. **Raven**: Seen almost every day.
126. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
127. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
128. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen most days.
129. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields.
130. **Rock Sparrow**: Seen at Alcollarín on 13th May.
131. **Common Waxbill**: Seen at Alcollarín on 13th May.
132. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on rice fields.
133. **Chaffinch**: Seen on several days

134. **Serin:** Seen daily.
135. **Greenfinch:** Seen on several days.
136. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
137. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
138. **Hawfinch:** Seen in Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
139. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen at Miravete Pass on 14th May.
140. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe and Cabañas del Castillo.
141. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Other wildlife

Butterflies

1. **Swallowtail**
2. **Small White**
3. **Bath White**
4. **Clouded Yellow**
5. **Cleopatra**
6. **Small Copper**
7. **Lang's Short-tailed Blue**
8. **Holly Blue**
9. **Brown Argus**
10. **Nettle-tree Butterfly**
11. **Two-tailed Pasha**
12. **Large Tortoiseshell**
13. **Red Admiral**
14. **Painted Lady**
15. **Queen of Spain Fritillary**
16. **Meadow Brown**
17. **Gatekeeper**
18. **Small Heath**
19. **Speckled Wood**
20. **Lulworth Skipper**
21. **Small Skipper**