

BIRDING REPORT FOR GEORGE AND LESLEY

13th – 21st February 2017

Birdingextremadura & Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Itinerary

13th February 2017: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

14th February 2017: Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas and Moheda Alta

15th February 2017: Montánchez Castle and Alcollarín Reservoir

16th February 2017: Alange and Santa Amalia

17th February 2017: Monfragüe National Park

18th February 2017: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Talaván Reservoir

19th February 2017: Plains west of Trujillo, Canchalejas azud, Alcollarín Reservoir and Campo Lugar plains

20th February 2017: Madrigalejo, Obando, Orellana Reservoir and Moheda Alta

21st February 2017: Transfer from Casa Rural El Recuerdo to Madrid airport with stop at Arrocampo Reservoir and Charco Salado

13th February 2017: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Martin collected George and Lesley just after 20.15 and we headed through the evening traffic on the Madrid ring road. Once on the motorway for Extremadura the traffic was fine. We made a stop for a tasty mixed salad at a bar just outside Madrid and then reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 23.50.

14th February 2017: Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas and Moheda Alta

It was a heavily overcast morning and only by mid-afternoon did the clouds break, although it did remain largely dry. We devoted the morning to an area of small-holdings, then rice fields and finally holm oak wood pasture with the quest of photographing the wintering **Common Cranes**. We had wonderful opportunities to do so, seeing the cranes as they explored a range of different foraging habitats. On the fields near Vegas Altas we also saw seven **Little Bustard** and a couple of parties of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**.

After coffee at the Moheda Alta Crane Centre, we spent most of the afternoon in the hide there overlooking rice-stubble fields. Here as well as the cranes, there were feeding **White Storks** and **Spoonbill**. Close to us were flocks of **Red Avadavat** and **Common Waxbills**. These in turn attracted the attention of a first winter **Hen Harrier** male, a very fine individual. Two female **Hen Harriers** were also present. The small passerines also brought in the attention of a female **Sparrowhawk**.

We were back at Casa Rural El Recuerdo in time for tea and after sunset we listened to the chorus of **Natterjack Toads**.

15th February 2016: Montánchez Castle and Alcollarín Reservoir

It was a fine and sunny morning, with a fresh breeze. Although it clouded over during the afternoon, it remained dry throughout. We drove west from Trujillo to the hill-top town of Montánchez where we spent the morning at the castle. There were magnificent views across the region, whilst around the castle were **Rock Buntings**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Thekla Lark** and **Crag Martins**. But it did not take long to locate our target for the morning: **Alpine Accentor**. During the morning, we found a total of three birds and had superb views of them from different angles and in different parts of the castle.

After celebratory refreshments in the tone, we then drove onto Miajadas. Here we admired a pair of **White Storks** nesting on the world's largest tomato. There was frequent interaction other storks in the vicinity. A **Great Spotted Cuckoo** was heard and at our feet we found numerous colonies of **Winter Webworm** (*Ocnogyna baetica*).

We had our picnic lunch at the Alcollarín Reservoir where we saw two **Black Stork**, about seven **Spoonbill**, as well as a good range of duck and **three species of grebe**.

16th February 2017: Alange and Santa Amalia

A wonderful spring-like day with sun shine and warm weather. Our focus was three-fold and we happily accomplished everything today. We started by walking from the town of Alange beside the reservoir with a wonderful rock face to our right. This hillside was alive with birds: **Common Chiffchaffs**, **Goldfinches**, **Thekla Larks**, **Sardinian Warblers** and **Black Redstarts**, with **House Martins** and **Crag Martins** above us. But our quarry was **Black Wheatear** and we managed to see three different individuals (a female and two males). One of these perched obligingly on rocks not too far away, fanning its tail delightfully. Close by we also had good views of **Blue Rock Thrush**. Over the crag two **Egyptian Vultures** passed: our first of the week, as well as some **Griffon Vultures**. After coffee in Alange, where **House Martins** were busy visiting their nests, we stopped to admire a colony of **Giant Orchids** by the roadside. Lunch then followed beside the dam at Alange, with the carpark full of the sound of singing **Serins**.

We then drove to the rice fields of Santa Amalia, where we watched **Water Pipits**, numerous wagtails including **Yellow Wagtail**, parties of cranes, but most anticipated of all at least three **Bluethroats**, including a very gaudy male.

On our return to home, we passed fields with large numbers of migrating **Black-tailed Godwits**.

17th February 2017: Monfragüe National Park

We were treated to another glorious day, with **Barn Swallows** singing beside the house as we left. We headed north through miles of unbroken *dehesa* landscape to the Monfragüe National park. We drove through the park to make our first stop at the Portilla del Tiétar. Here **Angel's Tears Narcissus** were in fine bloom and a **Holly Blue** flittered past. As we arrived a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** made an appearance and over the next hour or so we were treated to superb views of the resident pair there: calling, displaying, collecting nest material and resting. An immature bird also flew over. The **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** were almost second league in comparison, but we did stop to admire passing **Black Storks**. **Common Cranes** provided a wonderful sound backdrop for much of the time.

Just as it was difficult to imagine it getting any better, an **Otter** was spotted and after a few frustrating minutes when it appeared to have disappeared, we then saw it swimming towards a rocky ledge, where it hoisted itself up and rested, groomed and dozed in the warm sunshine!

After a coffee, nearby, we then had a picnic lunch beside the river, where a **Cleopatra** butterfly criss-crossed the scrubby hillside. We then spent some time in a shady area close to the River Tagus, watching **Blackcaps** and **Blue Tits** coming to bathe and a **Large Tortoiseshell** moving through the tree-tops. Our final stop was opposite the impressive Peña Falcon rock, where dozens of **Griffon Vultures** were returning to roost. A **Blue Rock Thrush** made a brief appearance, but we had more prolonged views of **Rock Bunting**. On a bare **Nettle-tree** the eponymous butterfly was sunning itself.

18th February 2017: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Talaván Reservoir

The day started out with clear skies, but quite quickly then clouded over. Just as we were finishing the afternoon, belts of rain with some flashes of lighting.

We took the road from Trujillo to Monroy, through initially a landscape dominated by massive granite outcrops, to a more undulating terrain of shales and slates. Parties of **Spanish Sparrows** were frequently on the fences, as were **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Thekla** and **Crested Larks**. Early on we saw a **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, flying along the road and then settling in a tree.

We stopped at a large field, full of **Lapwing**, **Golden Plover** and **Calandra Larks**. We found a group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** feeding at one edge. Birds rising in flocks in the distance suggested the presence of a raptor and we found the culprit – a female **Merlin** which was watched for several minutes as it hawked a passerine, probably a **Skylark**. It was hugely dramatic.

As we progressed **Red Kites** were almost constant companions to us.

We had coffee (plus two generous plates of *migas*) in a bar in Monroy and then went to the Talaván Reservoir for lunch. Here we also saw a group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, as well as more **Red Kites**, **Iberian Grey Shrikes** and waterfowl such as **Shoveler** and **Teal**.

We made a slow return to Trujillo across the plains to the east of Santa Marta de Magasca, where we saw a scattered group of over 70 **Great Bustard**, including several fine males, had more excellent views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, larks and just as the light was fading and the showers passing, a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, perched on successive pylons right close to the road.

19th February 2017: Plains west of Trujillo, Canchalejas azud, Alcollarín Reservoir and Campo Lugar plains

It was generally a sunny day with periods of cloud, but with a fresh north-easterly wind.

We started the day on the plains to the west of Trujillo. Here we had further opportunity of studying larks: **Crested**, **Thekla** and **Calandra**, as well as enjoying large flocks of **Golden Plover** and **Lapwing**. We had several sightings of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** as well as a particularly fine **Great Bustard**. After coffee near Santa Cruz de la Sierra, we visited the small dam of Canchalejas, near Villamesias. Here amongst a nice variety of duck (**Mallard**, **Shoveler**, **Teal**, **Tufted Duck** and **Pochard**), we found a fine male **Ring-necked Duck**. A family party of cranes appeared in the vicinity and there were also all three species of grebes present. Given the high winds, we sought shelter for our picnic at Alcollarín Reservoir, giving us a further chance to see **Black Stork**, **Spoonbill**, **Squacco Heron** as well as the antics of foraging **Chiffchaffs**. We then headed for the plains near Campo Lugar, encountering a splendid male **Hen Harrier** and then, beside a small pool which hosted **Spoonbill**, **Teal** and **Kingfisher**, we had several views of a **Long-eared Owl** in flight.

On the plains, there were flocks of larks and **Corn Buntings**, a large group of **Common Cranes** and parties of **Golden Plover** and **Lapwing**.

20th February 2017:, Obando, Orellana Reservoir and Moheda Alta

A gloriously sunny day but with a decidedly fresh north-easterly wind throughout. We ventured first to the plains north of Madrigajelo, to admire the patches of winter webworm, but also see a large gathering of **Common Cranes** on the pasture there.

Calandra Larks were singing above. From there we stopped at the old railway station of Madrigalejo to see the winter roost of **Stone Curlew**, with about 30 birds present.

We then drove through the rice stubble fields near Vegas Altas, crossing to the village of Obando. There were good numbers of **Common Cranes**, as well as large parties of **Common Snipe** and **Golden Plover**, as well as a few **Water Pipits**. Lesley saw a **Merlin** dash through, responsible for causing the eruption of flocks of snipe and **Golden Plovers** from the fields. After coffee at Obando, we took a road to Orellana de la Sierra, making a stop to admire the juxtaposition of olive orchards and almond groves, the latter in flower. **Woodlark** were present here.

Beside the Orellana Reservoir, where we had our picnic, there were groups of **Black-headed** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, amongst which was a winter-plumage **White-winged Tern** and a second winter **Yellow-legged Gull**. Two **Common Sandpiper** were present whilst at our feet were a fine show of **sand crocuses**.

We then visited another bay of the same reservoir, but 16 km away, near the village of Casas de Don Pedro. Here amongst a party of diving duck was a female **Greater Scaup** and we also saw seven **Red-crested Pochard** and at least five **Black-necked Grebes**, including one in breeding plumage. We completed the afternoon at the hide at Moheda Alta where a male and at least three female **Hen Harriers** was present but perhaps best of all was a good view of a male **Merlin**, seen in flight and then perched on rice stubble.

The **Stone Curlews** were still present their roost as we passed them at the end of the afternoon.

21st February 2017: Transfer from Casa Rural El Recuerdo to Madrid airport with stop at Arrocampo Reservoir and Charco Salado

Another day of sunshine but a fresh easterly wind, particularly strong in the morning. After bidding farewell at casa Rural El Recuerdo (and admiring a **Stripeless Tree Frog** in the *tinaja* outside the house), we took the motorway in the direction of Madrid for forty minutes to then spend most of the day close to the Arrocampo Reservoir. We spent most of the morning searching for **Black-winged Kite**, eventually finding one sheltered in the lee of a large tree, where we had good and prolonged views of it. Otherwise, we had seen a few **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Green Sandpiper** and the spring's first **Sand Martins**. After coffee, we visited a hide overlooking the marsh, but the high winds made the possibility of seeing very much rather limited, so after a valiant effort we made another visit to the farmlands with scattered trees to the west of the village of Saucedilla. We stopped at an attractive small lake Charca Salado, with a splendid view of the snow-capped Gredos Mountains to the north. There were **Great Egret** and a selection of duck present and Lesley found a **Black Kite** passing overhead.

On our return, we had superb view of not just one but two **Black-winged Kites**: a pair indeed, and we enjoyed watching them perched, in flight and collecting nesting material. We then had our picnic at Saucedilla, enjoying a good passage of raptors, mainly **Black** and **Griffon Vultures**, but also **Buzzard** and a fine male **Lesser Kestrel**.

As we made the final adjustments to the luggage before departing for Madrid, a **Glossy Ibis** flew over.

We then drove straight through to the airport, arriving on schedule at 18.00.

Bird List

1. Grey Lag Goose
2. Egyptian Goose
3. Common Shelduck
4. Wigeon
5. Gadwall
6. Teal
7. Pintail
8. Mallard
9. Shoveler
10. Red-crested Pochard
11. Pochard
12. Tufted Duck
13. Ring-necked Duck
14. Greater Scaup
15. Red-legged Partridge
16. Little Grebe
17. Great Crested Grebe
18. Black-necked Grebe
19. Great Cormorant
20. Squacco Heron
21. Cattle Egret
22. Little Egret
23. Great White Egret
24. Grey Heron
25. Black Stork
26. White Stork
27. Spoonbill
28. Glossy Ibis
29. Egyptian Vulture
30. Griffon Vulture
31. Black Vulture

32. Spanish Imperial Eagle
33. Black Kite
34. Red Kite
35. Marsh Harrier
36. Hen Harrier
37. Common Buzzard
38. Sparrowhawk
39. Black-winged Kite
40. Lesser Kestrel
41. Common Kestrel
42. Merlin
43. Peregrine Falcon
44. Water Rail
45. Moorhen
46. Purple Swamphen
47. Common Coot
48. Common Crane
49. Little Bustard
50. Great Bustard
51. Black-winged Stilt
52. Stone Curlew
53. Golden Plover
54. Lapwing
55. Dunlin
56. Little Stint
57. Common Snipe
58. Black-tailed Godwit
59. Greenshank
60. Green Sandpiper
61. Common Sandpiper
62. Lesser Black-backed Gull
63. Black-headed Gull
64. Yellow-legged Gull
65. White-winged Tern
66. Black-bellied Sandgrouse
67. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
68. Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon
69. Wood Pigeon
70. Collared Dove
71. Great Spotted Cuckoo
72. Little Owl
73. Long-eared Owl
74. Kingfisher

75. Hoopoe
76. Great Spotted Woodpecker
77. Calandra Lark
78. Crested Lark
79. Thekla Lark
80. Woodlark
81. Skylark
82. Sand Martin
83. Crag Martin
84. Barn Swallow
85. House Martin
86. Meadow Pipit
87. Water Pipit
88. Grey Wagtail
89. White Wagtail
90. Yellow Wagtail
91. Wren
92. Dunnock
93. Alpine Accentor
94. Robin
95. Bluethroat
96. Black Redstart
97. Stonechat
98. Black Wheatear
99. Blue Rock Thrush
100. Blackbird
101. Song Thrush
102. Mistle Thrush
103. Cetti's Warbler
104. Zitting Cisticola
105. Dartford Warbler
106. Sardinian Warbler
107. Blackcap
108. Chiffchaff
109. Firecrest
110. Long-tailed Tit
111. Blue Tit
112. Great Tit
113. Iberian Grey Shrike
114. Jay
115. Iberian Magpie
116. Magpie
117. Jackdaw

118. Raven
119. Common Starling
120. Spotless Starling
121. House Sparrow
122. Spanish Sparrow
123. Tree Sparrow
124. Red Avadavat
125. Common Waxbill
126. Chaffinch
127. Serin
128. Greenfinch
129. Goldfinch
130. Linnet
131. Hawfinch
132. Rock Bunting
133. Reed Bunting
134. Corn Bunting