

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR JOHN AND PENNY

2nd May – 9th May 2017

Itinerary

2nd May 2017: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

3rd May 2017: The plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, afternoon in area of Madroñera

4th May 2017: River Guadiana at Don Benito, Villafranca de los Barros, Alange, Sierra de Utrera and Roman Bridge at Mérida

5th May 2017: Plains of Campo Lugar, Sierra Brava Reservoir and rice fields around Madrigalejo, Alcollarín Reservoir.

6th May 2017: The plains east of Cáceres and Alcollarín Reservoir

7th May 2017: Vulture Hide near Torrejón El Rubio, Monfragüe National Park and Almonte River.

8th May 2017: The Jaraicejo heath and Miravete Pass, Belén Plains and Madroñera.

9th May 2017: Arrocampo Reservoir, El Sierro of Almaráz and return to Madrid



Report

2nd May 2017: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

John and Penny arrived almost on time but because of some delays with luggage, we were not able to leave the airport until 17.30. We headed south-west from Madrid, with heavy traffic in the opposite direction as people returned from their holiday weekend. This meant that for 130 kms, there was a contraflow in operation so our progress was a little slower than anticipated. At about the halfway point we stopped for a snack, watching **Crested Larks** in the forecourt of the service station and **Barn Swallows** nesting under the sunshades of the café. We reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 21.00.

3rd May 2017: The plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, afternoon in area of Madroñera

It was a sunny, calm and warm day and we enjoyed the morning photographing **Rollers** on the road east of Cáceres. **Little Owls** and **Lesser Kestrels** provided an excellent supporting cast. En route we had seen an immature **Spanish Imperial Eagle** perched on a pylon beside the motorway and whilst photographing the **Rollers**, we also saw a **Great Spotted Cuckoo**.

After coffee, we spent some time watching and photographing **Montagu's Harriers**, including an interaction with a **Black Kite**. We had lunch outside the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, continued across the plains where we found **Heart-flowered Tongue** and **Bug Orchids** just finishing flowering, and then visited the small town of Madroñera where we had excellent views of a roosting **Scops Owl**. From there we visited an area of heathland nearby, where **Dartford Warblers** and **Thekla Larks** were singing. **Knapweed** and **Queen of Spain Fritillaries** were on the wing. We completed the afternoon visiting a small reservoir nearby where we had good views of Kingfisher and Pallid Swifts and found a variety of dragonflies, including **Western Clubtail**, **Blue Emperor** and **Black-tailed Skimmers**.



4th May 2017: River Guadiana at Don Benito, Villafranca de los Barros, Alange, Sierra de Utrera and Roman Bridge at Mérida

We drove south and visited a small area of riverine habitat close to Don Benito. Here in a belt of willows and eucalyptus there were a host of small birds singing: **Golden Orioles, Melodious, Western Olivaceous, Cetti's** and **Reed Warblers**, and we managed views of all, as well as a **Penduline Tit**.

We then drove further south to the vast landscape of Tierra de los Barros, dominated by olive and vine cultivations. We looked for Rufous Bush Robin, but despite excellent conditions, none could be heard singing – almost certainly we were still a few days early for this late-arriving migrant. We then stopped beside the great dam wall of the Alange reservoir where we had lunch. We enjoyed some very good views of **Gull-billed Tern** and **Alpine Swift**, whilst on the rock face beside us there was a **Black Wheatear** and **Blue Rock Thrush**. Close by is the Sierra de Utrera, a beautiful wild valley full of

flowers. Here we found the rare and endemic **Green-flowered Tongue Orchid**, although the drought this spring meant that the specimens were not at their best. Also present was a **Montagu's Harrier** and numerous **Spanish Marbled Whites**.

We completed the day on the Roman Bridge in the centre of Mérida. We had excellent views of a **Penduline Tit** gathering reed aphids to feed young, as well as species like **Glossy Ibis**, **Purple Heron**, **Alpine**, **Common** and **Pallid Swifts**.

5th May 2017: Plains of Campo Lugar, Sierra Brava Reservoir and rice fields around Madrigalejo, Alcollarín Reservoir.

Being forecast as a more unsettled day with rain, we focused on the wetter habitats in the rice-growing area in the centre of Extremadura. First of all though we stopped at the plains near Campo Lugar. From our first (and only) stop, we watched displaying **Great** and **Little Bustards**, as well as a hunting **Black-winged Kite**. **Calandra Larks** sang constantly above our heads. We then made a stop beside the Sierra Brava reservoir, where there were several **Lesser Kestrel** hovering over the fields and a **Stone Curlew**. **Great Crested Grebes** populated the reservoir itself.

Some of the rice fields were being flooded, but many were still dry, as we drove slowly looking for birds. We had coffee in the village of Vegas Altas. On a pool near Moheda Alta we found a nice array of waders including **Avocet**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Kentish Plover**, **Ringed Plover**, **Dunlin** and **Collared Pratincoles**. Close to this pool we made use of the shelter of a hide for our picnic, whilst **Cetti's Warblers** showed briefly in front of us and a **Quail** called from the grassland.

At a pause beside the River Gargáligas, we saw **Little Bittern** and rather elusive **Great Reed Warblers**. We spent the first part of the afternoon on the rice fields near Palazuelo and were entertained by a family party of **Hoopoes**. On the Alcollarín Reservoir at the end of the afternoon, where the wind had picked up significantly. We found a small group of **Black Tern**.

6th May 2017: The plains east of Cáceres and Alcollarín Reservoir

It was a much-improved day weather-wise and ideal for a focus on two species for photography: Rollers and Bee-eaters. So we spent the morning concentrating on a pair of **Rollers** and were rewarded not just with some satisfying pictures but also some wonderful insights into their behaviour: courtship-feeding, the "rolling" flight, head-tossing displays, mating and an extraordinary moment when the Rollers physically pulled a female **Lesser Kestrel** from their nest box!

From our vantage point we could also watch a displaying **Little Bustard**! Along a side-road we had a great raptor moment with **Golden** and **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, **Lesser Kestrel**, **Black Kite** and a melanistic **Montagu's Harrier**

all in view at the same time. Shortly afterwards a **Short-toed Eagle** could be added to the list.

After coffee, we drove to the Alcollarín Reservoir where we spent an equally rewarding hour watching and photographing a **Bee-eater** colony, again with courtship feeding (the prey being dragonflies), mating and other interactions. One of the nest holes was occupied by **Rock Sparrows**.



After a picnic lunch, where a wonderful **Great Reed Warbler** sang almost continuously for us, we spent some time on the western shore of the reservoir. Here we found a very obliging **Temminck's Stint**, as well as three **Black-necked Grebes**. A few **Collared Pratincoles** were also present.

7th May 2017: Vulture Hide near Torrejón El Rubio, Monfragüe National Park and Almonte River.

We set off before dawn to be taken to the hide close to Monfragüe National Park where carrion had been laid out to attract vultures. As soon as we had arrived there were **White Storks** striding around making a few pecks at the meat, whilst **Black Kites** and a **Red Kite** made dramatic swoops. It was not long before vultures started to arrive and during the morning we saw about 60 **Griffon Vultures**, 20 **Black Vultures** and seven

Egyptian Vultures. The latter were highly entertaining when watched taking chicken's eggs and tossing them to the ground to break.



There was a massive “rugby scrum” when the hordes of vultures made a sudden launch onto the carcasses and then a long period afterwards, which was very rewarding for photography, when especially **Black Vultures** and **Egyptian Vultures** picked-over the remains.

After late-morning coffee at Torrejón el Rubio we entered the Monfragüe National Park. We had our picnic beside the River Tagus, in some mixed woodland where **Robins** were singing and huge numbers of **House Martins** were nesting on the bridge that spanned it. A **Large Tortoiseshell**, a **Long-tailed Blue** and a **Nettle-Tree Butterfly** were also seen.

We then stopped at the impressive Salto de Gitano viewpoint. Here as well as breeding **Griffon Vultures** and **Black Storks**, we had good views of **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting**.

On our way home, we stopped briefly at the River Almonte where **Blue-eyed Damselflies** were present.



8th May 2017: The Jaraicejo heath and Miravete Pass, Belén Plains and Madroñera.

It was a calm and sunny day, good conditions to start the day on the broom and lavender heath near Jaraicejo. Although we got several views of both **Spectacled** and **Dartford Warblers**, there was little song and most birds seemed busy with breeding. **Thekla Larks** were in full song though and we also saw **Short-toed Eagle** and **Black Vultures**. We made a stop beside the Arroyo de la Vid, where we had excellent views of **Melodious Warbler**, as well as **Western Orphean Warbler**. **Nightingales** were singing in full voice there.

After coffee, we drove to the Miravete Pass, entering a zone of pine woods where we heard **Crested Tit** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**, and saw **Subalpine** and **Dartford Warblers**. We had our picnic at the pass, where a **Woodlark** sang. **Subalpine** and **Sardinian Warblers** were present, wild **Gladiolus** flowered along a path and there were several **Queen of Spain Fritillary**.

We spent the first part of the afternoon driving across the Belén Plains, where we found a fine juvenile **Black-winged Kite**. The remainder of the afternoon was spent at the Madroñera Reservoir, watching **Kingfishers** and dragonflies, including **Blue Emperors**, **Broad Scarlets** and **Red-veined Darters**.



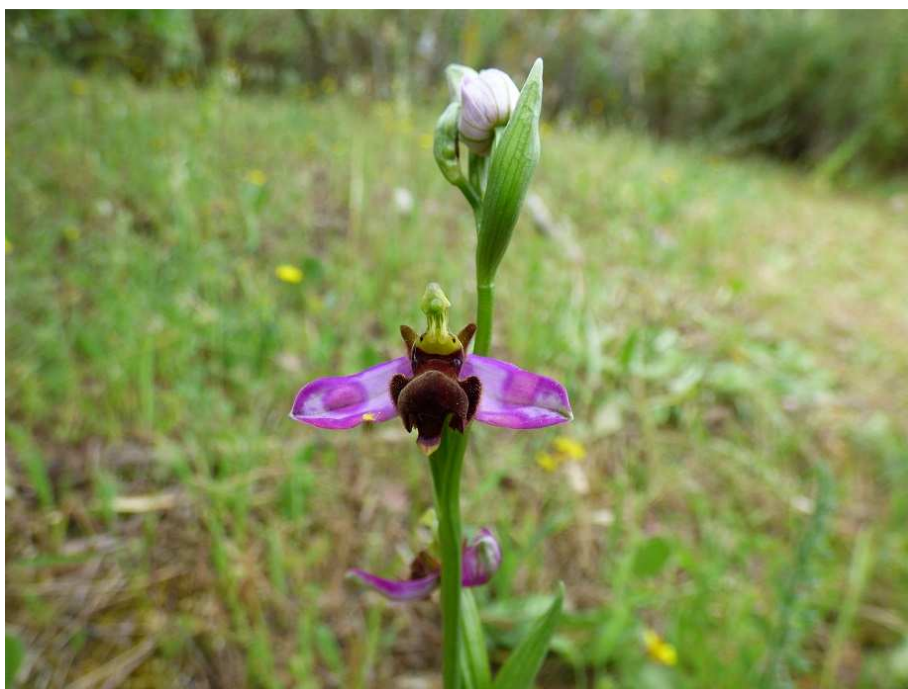
9th May 2017: Arrocampo Reservoir, El Sierro of Almaráz and return to Madrid

We set off from Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with wonderful spring weather to accompany us, making our first stop at the Arrocampo Reservoir. We focused our effort in one area of the marsh, succeeding in getting many views of **Purple Heron**, as well as other species like **Purple Swamphen**, **Black Tern**, **Gull-billed Tern**, **Savi's** and **Reed Warblers**.

At another stop, we had the wonderful experience of seeing a **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Squacco Heron** and **Little Bittern** all in the same belt of reeds. The dragonflies were also excellent with **Violet Dropwing**, **Banded Groundling** and **Long Skimmer** all present.



We then ascended the hill beside the town of Almaraz where we saw the small colony of the endemic **Almaraz Bee Orchid**.



It was then time to set off for Madrid. We stopped beside the Valdecañas Reservoir (here the water level was very low) to have a bite to eat and pack away the optics. After

a coffee halfway through the journey, we reached the airport as planned just before 14.30, giving John and Penny plenty of time check-in.

Species List

The focus of the holiday was to photograph certain species, rather than to see a maximum number of species. John and Penny had visited Extremadura on several previous occasions.

1. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín.
2. **Wigeon:** A drake at Alcollarín on 5th May.
3. **Gadwall:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
4. **Mallard:** Seen almost daily.
5. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen most days.
6. **Quail:** Heard at Moheda Alta.
7. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
8. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Sierra Brava, Alange and Alcollarín.
9. **Black-necked Grebe:** Three at Alcollarín.
10. **Great Cormorant:** Seen most days.
11. **Little Bittern:** Seen at River Gargáligas on 5th and at Arrocampo on 9th May.
12. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen in Mérida and at Arrocampo.
13. **Squacco Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo on 9th May.
14. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on several days.
15. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
16. **Great Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
17. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost every day.
18. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
19. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe on 7th May.
20. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
21. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Mérida on 5th May.
22. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Alcollarín on 6th May.
23. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen from vulture hide, Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
24. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
25. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
26. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen near Cáceres on 3rd and 6th May.
27. **Golden Eagle:** Seen near Cáceres on 6th May.
28. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen almost every day.
29. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost every day.
30. **Black Kite:** seen daily.
31. **Red Kite:** Seen on three days.
32. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on 5th May
33. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen on plains of Cáceres and near Alange.
34. **Common Buzzard:** Seen most days.

35. **Black-winged Kite:** An adult on Campo Lugar plains and a juvenile on Belén Plains.
36. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen most days.
37. **Common Kestrel:** Seen near Madrigalejo.
38. **Moorhen:** Seen most days.
39. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
40. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
41. **Little Bustard:** Seen at Campo Lugar and east of Cáceres.
42. **Great Bustard:** Displaying bird seen at Campo Lugar on 5th May.
43. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on several days.
44. **Avocet.** Two at Moheda Alta on 5th May.
45. **Stone Curlew:** One at Sierra Brava on 5th May.
46. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen at Moheda Alta and Alcollarín.
47. **Ringed Plover:** Seen at Moheda Alta on 5th May.
48. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Moheda Alta and Alcollarín.
49. **Kentish Plover:** Seen at Moheda Alta on 5th May.
50. **Dunlin:** Seen at Moheda Altra on 5th May.
51. **Temminck's Stint:** One at Alcollarín on 6th May.
52. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Moheda Alta and Alcollarín.
53. **Black Tern:** Three at Alcollarín on 5th and eight at Arrocampo on 9th May.
54. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen at Alange, Mérida, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
55. **Black-headed Gull:** seen on several days.
56. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen at Alange.
57. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** heard on plains east of Cáceres.
58. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
59. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
60. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
61. **Turtle Dove:** Seen on rice fields.
62. **Common Cuckoo:** Recorded almost every day.
63. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** One on plains east of Cáceres on 3rd May.
64. **Scops Owl:** Seen at Madroñera on 3rd May.
65. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains.
66. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange and Monfragüe.
67. **Common Swift:** Seen most days.
68. **Pallid Swift:** seen most days.
69. **Kingfisher:** Seen at Madroñera and on rice fields.
70. **Bee-eater:** Seen most days.
71. **Roller.** Seen on plains east of Cáceres.
72. **Hoopoe:** seen most days.
73. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
74. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on plains.
75. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
76. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.

77. **Woodlark**: Seen near Jaraicejo.
78. **Sand Martin**: Seen near Don Benito.
79. **Crag Martin**: Seen almost daily.
80. **Barn Swallow**: seen daily.
81. **Red-rumped swallow**: Seen daily.
82. **House Martin**: Seen daily.
83. **Yellow Wagtail**: Seen on rice fields.
84. **White Wagtail**: Seen most days.
85. **Wren**: Seen most days.
86. **Robin**: Seen in Monfragüe on 7th May.
87. **Nightingale**: Seen or heard daily.
88. **Black Redstart**: Seen in Monfragüe on 7th May.
89. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
90. **Black Wheatear**: Seen at Alange on 4th May.
91. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Alange and Monfragüe.
92. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
93. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on two days.
94. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen or heard almost every day.
95. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen almost daily.
96. **Savi's Warbler**: Seen at Arrocampo.
97. **Reed Warbler**: Seen most days.
98. **Great Reed Warbler**: Seen most days.
99. **Melodious Warbler**: Seen on several days.
100. **Western Olivaceous Warbler**: One singing at Don Benito on 4th May.
101. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen at Madroñera and Jaraicejo.
102. **Spectacled Warbler**: Seen at Jaraicejo on 8th May.
103. **Subalpine Warbler**: Seen at Miravete on 8th May.
104. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen daily.
105. **Western Orphean Warbler**: Heard at Alcollarín and seen at Jaraicejo.
106. **Blackcap**: Singing at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
107. **Western Bonelli's Warbler**: One at Alange and one at Mérida on 4th May.
108. **Spotted Flycatcher**: One near Palazuelo on 5th May.
109. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen most days.
110. **Crested Tit**: Recorded at Miravete on 8th May.
111. **Blue Tit**: Seen almost daily.
112. **Great Tit**: Seen every day.
113. **Nuthatch**: Seen at Jaraicejo.
114. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: singing at Miravete on 8th May.
115. **Penduline Tit**: Seen at Don Benito and Mérida.
116. **Golden Oriole**: Seen or heard on several days.
117. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen almost daily.
118. **Woodchat Shrike**: Seen daily.
119. **Jay**: Seen at Miravete.

120. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
121. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
122. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
123. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
124. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
125. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
126. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
127. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
128. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Alcollarín on 6th May.S
129. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
130. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
131. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
132. **Serin:** Seen daily.
133. **Greenfinch:** seen most days.
134. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
135. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
136. **Hawfinch:** Seen in Monfragüe on 7th May.
137. **Cirl Bunting:** Heard singing on two days.
138. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
139. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Butterflies

1. **Swallowtail**
2. **Scarce Swallowtail**
3. **Small White**
4. **Bath White**
5. **Clouded Yellow**
6. **False Ilex Hairstreak**
7. **Small Copper**
8. **Long-tailed Blue**
9. **Holly Blue**
10. **Brown Argus**
11. **Common Blue**
12. **Nettle-tree Butterfly**
13. **Large Tortoiseshell**
14. **Red Admiral**
15. **Painted Lady**
16. **Queen of Spain Fritillary**
17. **Marsh Fritillary**
18. **Spanish Marbled White**
19. **Meadow Brown**
20. **Gatekeeper**
21. **Southern Gatekeeper**

22. **Small Heath**
23. **Speckled Wood**
24. **Lulworth Skipper**
25. **Small Skipper**

Damselflies

1. **Southern Damselfly**
2. **Blue-eye**
3. **Iberian Blue-tail**

Dragonflies

1. **Blue Emperor**
2. **Northern Banded Groundling**
3. **Western Clubtail**
4. **Broad Scarlet**
5. **Black-tailed Skimmer**
6. **Long Skimmer**
7. **Red-veined Darter**
8. **Violet Dropwing**

Orchids

1. **Bug Orchid**
2. **Almaraz Bee Orchid**
3. **Common Tongue Orchid**
4. **Heart-flowered Tongue Orchid**
5. **Green-flowered Tongue Orchid**