

## HOLIDAY REPORT FOR GILL, BRENDA, PETER AND PAUL

### Casa Rural El Recuerdo & Birding Extremadura

#### “Plains, rivers and mountains in late spring”

19<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019



### Itinerary

**19<sup>th</sup> May 2019:** Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

**20<sup>th</sup> May 2019:** Campo Lugar Plains, Ricefields near Madrigalejo

**21<sup>st</sup> May 2019:** Almendralejo, Alange, Roman Bridge at Mérida and Don Benito

**22<sup>nd</sup> May 2019:** Alcollarín Reservoir and Palazuelo rice fields

**23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019:** Plains west of Trujillo and Monfragüe National Park

**24<sup>th</sup> May 2019:** Arrocampo Reservoir and Valdecañas

**25<sup>th</sup> May 2019:** Jaraicejo heath and cork woodland, Miravete Pass

**26<sup>th</sup> May 2019:** Plains west of Cáceres, Jerte valley, Tornavacas Pass and Hoyos del Espino.

**27<sup>th</sup> May 2019:** La Plataforma in Gredos Mountains and pines near Navarrondo de los Gredos.

**28<sup>th</sup> May 2019:** Hoyos del Espino, Peña Negra and return to Hoyos del Espino.

**29<sup>th</sup> May 2019:** Return to Madrid

## TRIP REPORT

### **20<sup>th</sup> May 2019: Campo Lugar Plains, Ricefields near Madrigalejo**

It was a fine day with calm conditions. The **Red-necked Nightjars** were heard calling before dawn. We started on plains near Campo Lugar. Here there were numerous **White Stork, Black Kites** and **Lesser Kestrels**, all busy feeding on grasshoppers. **Calandra Larks** heralded us with song. Eventually we had excellent views of **Great Bustard** striding across plains and also saw it in flight. Two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** were seen as well as **Rollers** and **Bee-eaters**.

We stopped for coffee at the edge of rice fields and then drove slowly through rice-growing farmland, finding some **Lapwing** and **Black-winged Stilt**. Lunch was had at the picnic area in the dehesa at Moheda Alta. At the nearby pool, we saw **Avocet**, some **Dunlin** and **Redshank**. Then we returned across the rice fields near Vegas Altas, where we found **Iberian Yellow Wagtail** feeding young and had wonderful views of **Collared Pratincoles**. We were also fortunate enough to see three **Quail**.

### **21<sup>st</sup> May 2019: Almendralejo, Alange, Roman Bridge at Mérida and Don Benito**

We set off at 08.30, driving for over an hour to reach the Terra de Barros area near Almendralejo. This is a vast landscape of olives and vines. We fairly quickly found **Rufous Bush Robin** and had superb views of it singing on old olive trees. **Crested Larks** were also present. We stopped at Alange to take a walk below the rocky outcrop there. We enjoyed wonderful views of **Black Wheatear** (bird of the trip for Gill!) and also many **Thekla Larks**, as well as other small birds. There were good numbers of hirundines and swifts, including numerous **Alpine Swifts**. After coffee, we continued to Roman Bridge in the centre of Mérida and enjoyed a very pleasant hour or so on bridge watching **Purple Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron**, brief views of **Penduline Tit**, better views of **Great Reed Warbler** and **Purple Swamphen**. But most memorable perhaps were the superb views of three species of swift: **Common, Pallid** and **Alpine**.

After a picnic in the shade beside Guadiana river, we went to visit riverine woodland near Don Benito. Here **Golden Orioles, Great Reed** and **Common Reed Warbler**, but pride of place was **Western Olivaceous Warbler** which was singing despite the time of day and gave a series of brief glimpses.

Back at Casa Rural El Recuerdo we could watch **Hawfinches** in the garden, feeding on milk thistle seeds.



### **22<sup>nd</sup> May 2019: Alcollarín Reservoir and Palazuelo rice fields**

After the long drives of yesterday and with the forecast of hot weather, we stayed more locally. We set off passing a pool in Zorita with young **Little Ringed Plovers** present. At Alcollarín, we spent the morning around the reservoir, seeing **Spoonbills**, **Great Crested** and **Little Grebes**, **Booted Eagle** and numerous **Woodchat Shrikes**. At the lunch area we had great views of **Purple Heron** and **Great Reed Warblers**. We went onto the rice fields again in afternoon, where we saw a flock of **Lapwing**, **Collared Pratincoles** and as **Melodious Warbler**. What was particularly fascinating was seeing the vast infrastructure for the rice irrigation and watching the fields in the process of being flooded.

### **23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019: Plains west of Trujillo and Monfragüe National Park**

It was another hot day, although patchily overcast first thing. We started on the plains west of Trujillo where we had excellent views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, a **Stone Curlew** and a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. We were serenaded by larks almost continuously. As we left, we enjoyed watching two young **Great Spotted Cuckoos** and

several **Woodchat Shrikes**. Then it was onward to Monfragüe, with a coffee first of all at Torrejon El Rubio. At Monfragüe, we made the ascent to the castle, where as well as the magnificent view we enjoyed the spectacle of passing **Griffon Vultures** and also saw **White-rumped Swift** very well. A late passage **Western Bonelli's Warbler** was in song. Then we proceeded to the Salto del Gitano viewpoint watching newly hatched **Black Stork** chicks, **Egyptian Vulture**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting** as well as numerous **Griffon Vultures**.

We had our picnic in the shade beside the River Tagus, seeing numerous **Alpine Swifts** and **House Martins**. We stopped nearby for excellent views of a male **Black-eared Wheatear**, beside a **Thekla Lark** and a **Woodchat Shrike**. Then finally to the viewpoint at the Portilla del Tiétar, where we watched an obliging **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, more **Griffon Vultures**, and a **Subalpine Warbler**.

#### **24<sup>th</sup> May 2019: Arrocampo Reservoir and Valdecañas**

Our first stop at the Arrocampo reservoir was on the ramp of a hide overlooking the marsh. We had perfect light and wind conditions for superb birdwatching. Over 35 species were seen including **Ferruginous Duck**, **Great Reed Warbler**, **Water Rail**, but pride of place were the nesting activities of **Purple Herons**. We then drove around in vain looking for Black-winged Kite, but saw **Iberian Grey Shrike**, **Rock Sparrows** and **Bee-eaters**. After coffee, we explored another region to the west, seeing **Glossy Ibis** and **Black-winged Stilts**. We had lunch in the shade of the information centre, then we stopped at another part of the marsh where we saw **Black-crowned Night Herons** and **Savi's Warblers**.

We enjoyed the rest of afternoon in the Valdecañas valley, rewarded with a lovely view of **Turtle Doves** and **Hawfinches**.

#### **25<sup>th</sup> May 2019: Jaraicejo heath and cork woodland, Miravete Pass.**

It was not such a hot day with a welcome breeze as well. We spent a very productive morning on the Jaraicejo heath and cork oak woodlands. Here we had superb views of a variety of warblers included **Spectacled** and **Western Orphean**, as well as goodies like **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** and **Crested Tits**. **Thekla Larks** were in abundance and we found a delightful family group of **Woodlark**. After coffee we rose to the Miravete Pass. Here we had our picnic, with magnificent views across to the Gredos Mountains and south onwards to Trujillo. **Griffon Vultures** passed by. There were a good selection of butterflies including **Cardinal** and **Marsh Fritillary**. We had an early return to base.



**26<sup>th</sup> May 2019: Plains west of Cáceres, Jerte valley, Tornavacas Pass and Hoyos del Espino.**

We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and headed west to visit the plains near Cáceres. Here we had superb views of **Rollers** and **Little Owls**, perched on the telegraph poles. We paused to admire the view across the Tamuja valley, where **Bee-eaters** were hawking insects.

After coffee we started the journey northwards, across vast plains of blond dry grass and badlands of yellow *retama* before reaching Plasencia. Here the landscape dramatically changed and we found ourselves driving up the dramatic Jerte Valley, snug inside the Gredos Mountains. Terraces of cherry orchards pushed high up each side and we bought a box of deliciously ripe cherries from one of the farms.

At the top of the valley there is the Tornavacas Pass. Here we had lunch. Unfortunately, it was very windy which made it difficult to find small birds (just glimpses of **Red-backed Shrike**) but our walk was rewarded by superb views of a pair of **Honey Buzzards**. **Green-underside Blues** were feeding on the lavender.

From there it was a gradual descent into the Tormes Valley with its pinewoods and lush alpine meadows. We stopped for a walk at Hoyos del Espino, finding a fine **Pied Flycatcher**, **Goldcrests** and **Coal Tits**.

We checked in at the hotel (Hostel Almanzor) to the sound of singing **Western Bonelli's Warblers** and at dusk, churring **European Nightjars**.

### **27<sup>th</sup> May 2019: La Plataforma in Gredos Mountains and pines near Navarrondo de los Gredos.**

At the hotel's hide, a small flock of **Common Crossbill** were present just after breakfast. We spent the morning at high altitude, walking from the Plataforma, across the granite rocks and broom moorland. The place was full of birds: **Northern Wheatear**, **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**, **Ortolan** and **Rock Buntings**. **Skylarks** sang from above us whilst **Dunnocks** perched on the broom. We spent a long time searching for Bluethroat but to no avail.



We had lunch at the Plataforma, enjoying the sight of **Spanish Ibex** at close quarters.

In the afternoon, we explored the pine woods near Navarredonda, seeing **Red Squirrel**, **Pied Flycatchers** amongst others.

**28<sup>th</sup> May 2019: Hoyos del Espino, Peña Negra and return to Hoyos del Espino.**

An **Iberian Green Woodpecker** was the star turn at the hide before breakfast. We spent the first part of the morning back in the pinewoods at Hoyos del Espino, seeing two **Firecrests**, **Crested Tits** and thanks to Peter's eagle-eye and patience, a male **Citril Finch**.

At our coffee stop we had magnificent views of **Red** and **Black Kite** as well as **Melodious Warblers**. We then drove to the smooth mountain top at Peña Negra. Here we had good views of **Tawny Pipit**, as well as **Northern Wheatear**, **Iberian Yellow Wagtail** and **Ortolan Bunting**. At the car park was a **Schreiber's Green Lizard**.



We returned to the Hoyos picnic area and then went a short distance east into the pines. This was a very productive foray with another excellent encounter with **Honey Buzzards**, as well as a delightful pair of **Ocellated Lizard**.

We returned early to the hotel to pack.



### **29<sup>th</sup> May 2019: Return to Madrid**

We set off at 05.45, to the sound of **Scops Owls** and **European Nightjars**. It was a smooth run through to Madrid, until we hit the morning rush-hour on the ring-road. At least it gave us the chance to see **Monk Parakeets** flying past. We arrived at the airport at 08.45.

### **BIRD LIST**

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Moheda Alta and Alcollarín.
2. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
3. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
4. **Ferruginous Duck**: Four seen at Arrocampo on 24<sup>th</sup> May.
5. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen in Gredos Mountains.
6. **Quail**: Seen at Vegas Altas and heard in Gredos.
7. **Little Grebe**: Seen on reservoirs.
8. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen on reservoirs.
9. **Great Cormorant**: Seen on several days.
10. **Little Bittern**: Seen several times at Arrocampo.
11. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.



12. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on several days.
13. **Little Egret:** Seen on several days.
14. **Great Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
15. **Grey Heron:** Seen on most days.
16. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Mérida, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
17. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
18. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
19. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Arrocampo.
20. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Moheda Alta and Alcollarín.
21. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen in Monfragüe.
22. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
23. **Black Vulture:** Seen on several days.
24. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and in Monfragüe.
25. **Short-toed Eagle:** One seen on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.
26. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
27. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
28. **Red Kite:** Seen on several days.
29. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on rice fields, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
30. **Montagu's Harrier:** One seen on plains on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.
31. **Common Buzzard:** Seen most days.
32. **Honey Buzzard:** Two seen at Tornavacas on 26<sup>th</sup> and two at Hoyos del Espino on 28<sup>th</sup> May.
33. **Sparrowhawk:** One at Hoyos del Espino on 27<sup>th</sup> May.
34. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen most days.
35. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on three days.
36. **Peregrine:** One at Peña Negra on 28<sup>th</sup> May.
37. **Water Rail:** One at Arrocampo on 24<sup>th</sup> May.
38. **Moorhen:** Seen on several days.
39. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
40. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
41. **Great Bustard:** A male at Campo Lugar.
42. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen most days.
43. **Avocet:** Seen at Moheda Alta.
44. **Stone Curlew:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
45. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen on both visits to the rice fields.
46. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on several days.
47. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen on both visits to the rice fields.
48. **Common Redshank:** Seen at Moheda Alta and Arrocampo.
49. **Dunlin:** Seen at Moheda Alta.
50. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen at Alange, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
51. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Alange.
52. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen at Campo Lugar.
53. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo.

54. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
55. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
56. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
57. **Turtle Dove:** Seen at Valdecañas and in Gredos.
58. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** A family of two fledged birds seen on plains and a family of three at Arrocampo.
59. **Common Cuckoo:** Recorded almost daily.
60. **Scops Owl:** Calling at Navarredonda.
61. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains and near Arrocampo.
62. **Red-necked Nightjar:** Calling at Pago de San Clemente.
63. **European Nightjar:** Calling at Navarredonda.
64. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange, Mérida and Monfragüe.
65. **Common Swift:** Seen daily.
66. **Pallid Swift:** Seen at Mérida.
67. **White-rumped Swift:** Seen at Monfragüe.
68. **Monk Parakeet:** Seen in Madrid.
69. **Kingfisher:** Seen on several days.
70. **Bee-eater:** Seen almost every day.
71. **Roller:** Seen at Campo Lugar and Cáceres plains.
72. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost every day.
73. **Iberian Green Woodpecker:** Seen in Gredos.
74. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen in Gredos.
75. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 25<sup>th</sup> May.
76. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
77. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on Campo Lugar plains and west of Cáceres.
78. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost daily.
79. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
80. **Woodlark:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
81. **Skylark:** Seen in the Gredos.
82. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
83. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
84. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
85. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen almost daily.
86. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
87. **Water Pipit:** Seen in the Gredos.
88. **Tawny Pipit:** Seen on Peña Negra on 28<sup>th</sup> May.
89. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on rice fields and in Gredos.
90. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen in Gredos.
91. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
92. **Wren:** Seen on several days.
93. **Dunnock:** Seen in the Gredos.
94. **Rufous Bush Robin:** Seen near Almendralejo on 21<sup>st</sup> May.
95. **Robin:** Seen on several days.

96. **Nightingale**: Recorded daily.
97. **Black Redstart**: Seen most days.
98. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
99. **Northern Wheatear**: Seen in the Gredos.
100. **Black-eared Wheatear**: Seen at Monfragüe.
101. **Black Wheatear**: Seen at Alange.
102. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Alange, Monfragüe and the Gredos.
103. **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**: Seen in Gredos on 27<sup>th</sup> May.
104. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
105. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on several days.
106. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen most days.
107. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on three days.
108. **Savi's Warbler**: Seen at Arrocampo.
109. **Reed Warbler**: Seen on several days.
110. **Great Reed Warbler**: Seen on several days.
111. **Melodious Warbler**: Seen on rice fields, Jaraicejo and the Gredos.
112. **Western Olivaceous Warbler**: Seen near Don Benito on 21<sup>st</sup> May.
113. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen in Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
114. **Spectacled Warbler**: Seen at Jaraicejo and Peña Negra.
115. **Subalpine Warbler**: Seen in Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
116. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen most days.
117. **Western Orphean Warbler**: Seen at Jaraicejo.
118. **Common Whitethroat**: Seen in the Gredos.
119. **Blackcap**: Seen daily.
120. **Western Bonelli's Warbler**: Seen in Monfragüe and the Gredos.
121. **Common Chiffchaff**: Heard near Hoyos del Espino on 27<sup>th</sup> May.
122. **Goldcrest**: Seen in Gredos.
123. **Firecrest**: Seen in Gredos.
124. **Pied Flycatcher**: Seen in the Gredos.
125. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen most days.
126. **Crested Tit**: Seen in Jaraicejo and the Gredos.
127. **Coal Tit**: Seen in the Gredos.
128. **Blue Tit**: Seen daily.
129. **Great Tit**: Seen most days.
130. **Nuthatch**: Seen in Jaraicejo and the Gredos.
131. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Seen most days.
132. **Penduline Tit**: Seen at Mérida.
133. **Golden Oriole**: Seen on several days.
134. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen most days.
135. **Woodchat Shrike**: Seen most days.
136. **Red-backed Shrike**: Seen briefly at Tornavacas Pass.
137. **Jay**: Seen on several days.
138. **Azure-winged Magpie**: Seen most days.

- 139. **Magpie:** Seen almost daily.
- 140. **Jackdaw:** Seen most days.
- 141. **Carrion Crow:** Seen in Gredos.
- 142. **Raven:** Seen most days.
- 143. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
- 144. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
- 145. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
- 146. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
- 147. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Arrocampo and in Gredos.
- 148. **Common Waxbill:** Seen near Guadiana River and rice fields.
- 149. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
- 150. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
- 151. **Serin:** Seen daily.
- 152. **Greenfinch:** Seen on several days.
- 153. **Citril Finch:** Seen at Hoyos del Espino on 28<sup>th</sup> May.
- 154. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
- 155. **Linnet:** Seen almost daily.
- 156. **Common Crossbill:** Seen in Gredos.
- 157. **Hawfinch:** Seen most days, especially at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
- 158. **Cirl Bunting:** Heard on three days.
- 159. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Alange, Monfragüe and in the Gredos.
- 160. **Oortolan Bunting:** Seen in the Gredos.
- 161. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

## **Butterflies**

- 1. **Swallowtail**
- 2. **Small White**
- 3. **Bath White**
- 4. **Moroccan Orange Tip**
- 5. **Clouded Yellow**
- 6. **Berger's Clouded Yellow**
- 7. **Cleopatra**
- 8. **Small Copper**
- 9. **Holly Blue**
- 10. **Black-eyed Blue**
- 11. **Green-underside Blue**
- 12. **Brown Argus**
- 13. **Common Blue**
- 14. **Large Tortoiseshell**
- 15. **Red Admiral**
- 16. **Small Tortoiseshell**

17. **Painted Lady**
18. **Cardinal**
19. **Queen of Spain Fritillary**
20. **Heath Fritillary**
21. **Marsh Fritillary**
22. **Meadow Brown**
23. **Spanish Gatekeeper**
24. **Southern Gatekeeper**
25. **Small Heath**
26. **Speckled Wood**
27. **Wall Brown**
28. **Mallow Skipper**