

## HOLIDAY REPORT FOR LAURENCE AND VERONICA

### Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

24<sup>th</sup> March – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019

#### Itinerary

**24<sup>th</sup> March 2019:** Transfer from Madrid

**25<sup>th</sup> March 2019:** Sierra Brava Reservoir, Madrigalejo, Puerto Peña. Casas de Don Pedro, Moheda Alta, Fernando V

**26<sup>th</sup> March 2019:** Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and afternoon visit to Trujillo

**27<sup>th</sup> March 2019:** Alange and Mérida

**28<sup>th</sup> March 2019:** Monfragüe National Park

**29<sup>th</sup> March 2019:** Campo Lugar plains, Alcollarín and Canchalejas Reservoirs

**30<sup>th</sup> March 2019:** Plains near Cáceres, Cáceres city, Alcantara Roman Bridge

**31<sup>st</sup> March 2019:** Jaraicejo and Arroyo de la Vid, Belén Plains.

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2019:** Cañamero, Guadalupe, Moheda Alta, Rio Gargaligas, return via plains of Campo Lugar

**2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019:** Arrocampo reservoir, Charco Salado and Almaraz hill

**3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019:** Return to Madrid



## TRIP REPORT

### 24<sup>th</sup> March 2019: Transfer from Madrid.

Laurence and Veronica were met by Martin shortly before 16.00 and we made our way effortlessly out of Madrid, around the southern half of the ring road and onto the motorway for Extremadura. We reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 18.30.

### 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019: Sierra Brava Reservoir, Madrigalejo, Puerto Peña. Casas de Don Pedro, Moheda Alta, Fernando V

It was a warm and sunny day with a rather fresh wind. We headed south, through the town of Zorita, across open plains and then to the southern end of the Sierra Brava reservoir. Here we had lovely views of an **Iberian Hare**. But it did not outshine the birds which included all five of the hirundine species (seen whilst we stood at one stop), numerous **Great Crested Grebes**, a very fine **Marsh Harrier** and, most memorable of all, an **Eagle Owl**. Nearby we came across a large pack of **Griffon Vultures** on ground, accompanied by some **Black Vultures** and we rewarded by spectacular views of some of them in sky low overhead.



After crossing an open area where fields were being prepared for sowing rice, we stopped at an old gravel working near Madrigalejo. Here we had good views of a drake **Garganey**, **Black-winged Stilt** and **Wood Sandpiper** (at times all three in the same field of view). After a coffee stop at Madrigalejo, we paused briefly at the Gargaligás River where a White Stork's nest also

hosted a colony of sparrows. From there we drove to Puerto Peña, for our picnic with a spectacular view across the Guadiana River onto a huge rock face. Here we saw all three vultures (**Black, Griffon and Egyptian**) as well as **Black Storks** and **Alpine Swifts**. We started the afternoon dropping into a bay of the Orellana Reservoir near the town of Casas del Don Pedro. Here there was a good range of duck, including **Red-crested Pochard**. A **Woodchat Shrike** was singing nearby. Afterwards we checked a pool near Moheda Alta where there were two pairs of **Pintail** and parties of **Collared Pratincoles, Spoonbills** and **Little Stint**. We ended the afternoon driving beside the rice-fields near Fernando V, where we came across a very late group of six Common Cranes and had excellent views of **Hoopoes** and **Azure-winged Magpies**.

### **26<sup>th</sup> March 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and afternoon visit to Trujillo**

It was another sunny day but with a rather strong easterly wind. We explored the open plains west of Trujillo, making our first stop along a dirt road with good panoramic views across the terrain. We quickly found a male **Little Bustard** and soon afterwards a party of **Great Bustard**. Whilst watching those, an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** flew across our view. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** were also seen, both in flight and feeding on the ground. Smaller birds were also in good numbers: **Thekla Lark, Calandra Lark** and especially **Corn Buntings**. From there we enter some *dehesa* wood pasture, dominated by holm oak trees and stopped at a vantage point overlooking the Tamuja River. Here we had a sighting of **Short-toed Eagle**, but most enchantingly was the appearance of three **Otters** which we watched at length as they fished and played. After coffee in a typical rural bar in the village, where we watched **House Martins** nest-building, we moved on to a picnic beside the Magasca River. Here we also had plenty of distractions with **Spanish Terrapins**, a singing **Girl Bunting**, plenty of **Crag Martins**, a **Golden Eagle**, as well as a steady stream of vultures and kites. Back to plains we took a walk along a mediaeval drovers' trail where we saw **Short-toed Lark** and **Woodchat Shrike**.

We completed the afternoon with a visit to the historic centre of Trujillo, seeing the Moorish fort, the early mediaeval fortified palaces and the 16<sup>th</sup> century Main Square influenced by the conquistadores. Birds also performed well for us including: **Lesser Kestrels, Pallid Swift, Crag Martins** and **White Storks**.

### **27<sup>th</sup> March 2019: Alange and Mérida**

The sunshine continued today, as did the easterly wind. We travelled to the centre of Extremadura, stopping first at the edge of the town of Alange, beside the reservoir of the same name, where we walked beside a rocky outcrop. Here we had excellent views of **Black Wheatear**, as well as **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Thekla Lark**. After coffee with a view onto the rocks and the small fort at its peak, we headed the short distance northwards to the capital city of Extremadura, Mérida. We stopped first beside the magnificent Aqueduct de los Milagros, where had picnic with **Glossy Ibis** in close company.



Then Laurence and Veronica visited the Amphitheatre, Theatre and Roman Museum ending with walk on Roman Bridge. Here we saw more **Glossy Ibis**, a fine **Black-crowned Night Heron**, a **Penduline Tit** nest building, **Purple Swamphen**, as well as **Alpine** and **Pallid Swifts**.

### **28<sup>th</sup> March 2019: Monfragüe National Park**

The prevailing weather continued with sunshine and a fresh easterly wind. We headed norther of Trujillo, through a vast dh landscape, until reaching the rocky quartzite rocky crests marking the start of the Monfragüe National Park. We stopped to admire the iconic Peña Falcón rock face, where countless **Griffon Vultures** were present, as well as some **Black** and **Egyptian Vultures**. We had excellent views of **Black Stork**, as well as smaller birds like **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart** and **Rock Bunting**.

After coffee at the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos in the centre of the park, we dropped in at Puerto de Serrana, where we had brief views of a **Subalpine Warbler** but more prolonged observation of a Short-toed Eagle. Our picnic was under the shade of Southern Elm trees at the Tajadilla. Here we celebrated more superb views of vultures, as well as a second **Short-toed Eagle** and a superb **Bonelli's Eagle**. Most memorable, perhaps, though were the obliging **Hawfinches** just as we were about to leave. Onward we continued, to visit the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint where we had excellent views of **Spanish Imperial Eagle** in flight as well as perched on top of the cliff. There were plenty of **Griffon Vultures**, including some chicks visible in nests. We had a walk beside the River Tajo at the Fuente de Francés, where hundreds of

**House Martins** were nesting under the road bridge, **Chaffinches** and **Robins** sang and we had sightings of butterflies, such as **Nettle-Tree**. On our way back to base, we paused to look across the valley of the River Almonte where we could hear the chorus of **Iberian Water Frogs**.

### **29<sup>th</sup> March 2019: Campo Lugar plains, Alcollarín and Canchalejas Reservoirs**

It was yet another warm and sunny day. We visited the plains south of Zorita, near the village of Campo Lugar to start the morning, with fine views of **Great Bustards**. Most extraordinary was the sight of a **Golden Eagle** flying in, making an attempt to take one of the bustards (a large male) which flew off in disgust. We enjoyed yet more good views of larks (especially **Calandra**, **Crested** and **Thekla**) and saw several **Northern Wheatears**. Vultures passed overhead and at a small pool we found a nice selection of duck, as well as **Black-winged Stilt**.



As we approached the village, we had great views of an **Osprey** which was perched on a pylon with a half-eastern fish in its talons.

After coffee outside the village, close to an old grain silo which hosted nesting **Lesser Kestrels** and **House Martins**, we went to the Alcollarín reservoir. We had our picnic in the shade of holm oak trees beside a small body of water, where there were nesting **White Storks**. **Willow Warblers** sang and we watched a displaying **Marsh Harrier**. After lunch, we spent a little more

time at the reservoir, seeing a **Golden Eagle**, **Short-toed Eagle**, **Woodchat Shrikes** and **Black-necked Grebes**.

We then checked another small reservoir Canchalejas, near Villamesias. This was a lovely spot, with a fine flock of sheep and goats crossing the valley. There was a good selection of waders present, including **Ruff**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Spotted Redshank**, large numbers of **Black-winged Stilts** and some **Lapwing**.

### **30<sup>th</sup> March 2019: Plains near Cáceres, Cáceres city, Alcantara Roman Bridge**

Today we ventured westwards, stopping first briefly on the plains close to Cáceres, where we saw a displaying **Great Bustards**. **Calandra Larks** were singing around us. We spent the rest of the morning visiting the medieval centre of Cáceres city. Numerous **Pallid Swifts** were in the skies above the buildings, as were **Lesser Kestrels**. Following coffee in the Main Square, we dropped in to see the Interpretation Centre for the Maltravieso Cave, home of the oldest cave paintings in the world.



We then proceeded to Alcantara, where a magnificent Roman Bridge crossed the River Tajo. We had enough time to thoroughly soak in the impressive monument and its surroundings. As we started our return, we saw a **Bee-eater** on the wires beside the road. We returned briefly to

the plains close to Cáceres, this time seeing **Little Owl**, **Lesser Kestrels** and numerous **Jackdaws**.



### **31<sup>st</sup> March 2019: Jaraicejo and Arroyo de la Vid, Belén Plains.**

It was a cooler day with a fresh north-easterly wind and clouds appearing in the afternoon. We started on the broom heathland at Jaraicejo and a walk into a beautiful cork oak woodland. On the heath we had excellent views of **Dartford** and **Spectacled Warblers**, **Thekla Larks** and **Corn Buntings**, whilst in the woodland there was a Nightingale singing, Nuthatches calling, and we saw **Booted Eagles** overhead. Following coffee, we took a quick look from Puerto de Miravete where there was a passage of **Black Kites**. We had our picnic lunch at Arroyo de la Vid, another lovely spot with **Crag Martins** at the old bridge and superb selection of warblers present: **Western Orphean Warbler**, **Sardinian** and **Subalpine**.

South of Jaraicejo we admired the three bridges crossing the River Almonte (dating from 1450 to 1992) and enjoyed the spectacle of chorusing frogs.

We spent the rest of the afternoon crossing the plains of Belén. Here we had very good views of larks: **Short-toed Lark**, **Thekla**, **Crested** and **Calandra**.

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2019: Cañamero, Guadalupe, Moheda Alta, Rio Gargaligas, return via plains of Campo Lugar**

There was rain overnight and it stayed generally overcast during the day with some sunny periods with rain threatening in late afternoon. We headed east to the Villuerkas Mountains, making our first stop at the Charca de Nutria near Cañamero. Here is the Cueva Chica, we saw the rock paintings there, below an overhang, where **Crag Martins** were perching, and **Red-rumped Swallows** swooped. **Nuthatches** were in the surrounding woodland. We then continued to Guadalupe for a visit to Monastery and Church. We had our picnic at a viewpoint overlooking the town near the small chapel there. A **Cirl Bunting** was singing.

From then we returned south to the pool at Moheda Alta, where the same group of **Spoonbills** that had been there a few days earlier, were still present, in the same spot. There was also a good number of waders including **Kentish Plover** and **Little Stint**. We returned through a variety of landscapes: *dehesas*, plains and rice fields. At the River Gargaligás a **Great Reed Warbler** and **Reed Warbler** were singing.

**2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019: Arrocampo reservoir, Charco Salado and Almaraz hill**



After yesterday's unsettled weather, it was much better. We headed north-east to spend the whole morning at the Arrocampo Reservoir and surroundings. Here in the fringing vegetation of



lesser reed mace we had superb views of several **Purple Heron**, **Purple Swamphen**, **Marsh Harriers** and numerous **Sand Martins**. **Savi's Warblers** were in sing at several places. Then after coffee we spent some time driving through farmland until we found a party of **Bee-eaters** and had the good fortune to watch one very obliging individual perched on a fence. **Black-winged Stilts** were also seen.

We had lunch in *dehesa* by Charco Salado. Here a Great Reed Warbler was singing and we had wonderful views of Spoonbill, as well as **Booted** and **Golden Eagle**. But perhaps the most charming was a very cooperative **Woodlark**.

We spent the afternoon in the olive groves above the town of Almaráz, where we found a great selection of orchids: Naked Man, Early Spider, Mirror, Conical, Woodcock, and Yellow Bee. And when returning to Pago de San Clemente we took time to admire the Champagne Orchids growing at the entrance of the village.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019: Return to Madrid**

We left before dawn (07.30) and arrived as planned at about 10.20 at Madrid's Terminal 2, in time for the check-in.

### **List of species recorded**

#### **Birds**

1. Egyptian Goose
2. Gadwall
3. Teal
4. Mallard
5. Pintail
6. Garganey
7. Shoveler
8. Tufted Duck
9. Red-crested Pochard
10. Common Pochard
11. Shelduck
12. Quail
13. Little Grebe
14. Great Crested Grebe
15. Black-necked Grebe
16. Great Cormorant
17. Black-crowned Night Heron
18. Cattle Egret
19. Little Egret
20. Great Egret
21. Grey Heron
22. Purple Heron
23. Black Stork
24. White Stork

25. Glossy Ibis
26. Spoonbill
27. Black Kite
28. Red Kite
29. Egyptian Vulture
30. Griffon Vulture
31. Black Vulture
32. Short-toed Eagle
33. Marsh Harrier
34. Common Buzzard
35. Spanish Imperial Eagle
36. Golden Eagle
37. Bonelli's Eagle
38. Booted Eagle
39. Lesser Kestrel
40. Common Kestrel
41. Water Rail
42. Moorhen
43. Purple Swamphen
44. Common Coot
45. Common Crane
46. Little Bustard
47. Great Bustard
48. Black-winged Stilt
49. Stone Curlew
50. Collared Pratincole
51. Little Ringed Plover
52. Kentish Plover
53. Lapwing
54. Dunlin
55. Little Stint
56. Ruff
57. Common Snipe
58. Common Redshank
59. Spotted Redshank
60. Greenshank
61. Green Sandpiper
62. Wood Sandpiper
63. Common Sandpiper
64. Black-headed Gull
65. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
66. Feral Pigeon
67. Wood Pigeon
68. Collared Dove
69. Common Cuckoo
70. Eagle Owl
71. Little Owl

72. Alpine Swift
73. Pallid Swift
74. Kingfisher
75. Bee-eater
76. Hoopoe
77. Great Spotted Woodpecker
78. Calandra lark
79. Short-toed Lark
80. Crested Lark
81. Thekla Lark
82. Woodlark
83. Sand Martin
84. Crag Martin
85. Barn Swallow
86. Red-rumped Swallow
87. House Martin
88. Meadow Pipit
89. Yellow Wagtail
90. Grey Wagtail
91. White Wagtail
92. Robin
93. Nightingale
94. Black Redstart
95. Stonechat
96. Northern Wheatear
97. Black Wheatear
98. Blue Rock Thrush
99. Blackbird
100. Song Thrush
101. Mistle Thrush
102. Cetti's Warbler
103. Zitting Cisticola
104. Savi's Warbler
105. Reed Warbler
106. Great Reed Warbler
107. Dartford Warbler
108. Spectacled Warbler
109. Subalpine Warbler
110. Sardinian Warbler
111. Western Orphean Warbler
112. Blackcap
113. Common Chiffchaff
114. Willow Warbler
115. Wren
116. Long-tailed Tit
117. Blue Tit
118. Great Tit

119. Nuthatch
120. Short-toed Treecreeper
121. Penduline Tit
122. Iberian Grey Shrike
123. Woodchat Shrike
124. Jay
125. Azure-winged Magpie
126. Magpie
127. Jackdaw
128. Raven
129. Spotless Starling
130. House Sparrow
131. Spanish Sparrow
132. Tree Sparrow
133. Red Avadavat
134. Chaffinch
135. Serin
136. Greenfinch
137. Goldfinch
138. Linnet
139. Hawfinch
140. Cirl Bunting
141. Rock Bunting
142. Corn Bunting

### **Mammals**

1. Otter
2. Egyptian Mongoose
3. Red Deer
4. Iberian Hare

### **Reptiles & Amphibians**

1. Pond Terrapin
2. Spanish Terrapin
3. Western Psammadromus
4. Large Psammadromus
5. Geniez's Wall Lizard
6. Iberian Water Frog

### **Butterflies**

1. Swallowtail
2. Scarce Swallowtail
3. Spanish Festoon

4. Small White
5. Western Dappled White
6. Clouded Yellow
7. Chapman's Green Hairstreak
8. Small Copper
9. Brown Argus
10. Common Blue
11. Holly Blue
12. Large Tortoiseshell
13. Red Admiral
14. Painted Lady
15. Small Heath

**Selection of plants**

1. Naked Man Orchid
2. Conical Orchid
3. Champagne Orchid
4. Woodcock Orchid
5. Mirror Orchid
6. Early Spider Orchid
7. Yellow Bee Orchid
8. Barbary Nut Iris
9. Angel's Tears Narcissus