

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



MID-SUMMER DRAGONFLIES HOLIDAY FOR DELIA

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

17th – 15th June 2023



Itinerary

17th June 2023: Transfer from Madrid with stop near Casatejada and Saucedilla

18th June 2023: Alcollarín Reservoir and Zorita

19th June 2023: Arroyo de la Vid, Ibor River and Castañar del Ibor

20th June 2023: River Ruercas and River Almonte

21st June 2023: River Guadiana near Don Álvaro, Mérida and Medellín

22nd June 2023: Malpartida de Cáceres and El Parque de Príncipe in Cáceres.

23rd June 2023: Monfragüe, Las Mestas and Casatejada.

24th June 2023: Alcollarín and return to Madrid.

TRIP REPORT

17th June 2023: Transfer from Madrid with stop near Casatejada and Saucedilla

Martin met Delia at Terminal Two, in the early afternoon. We headed off out of Madrid just as the late afternoon traffic was building up. On the open road for Extremadura it was then a very smooth run with hot and sunny weather. We stopped halfway for refreshments, and admired the **Barn Swallows** nesting under the awnings of the service station. A little further on, once we had entered Extremadura, we made stop near Casatejada, at a small gravel pit. Here we found **Violet Dropwing, Broad Scarlet, Iberian Bluetail** and numerous **White Featherlegs**. Birds included a **Purple Heron**.



White Featherleg (Delia)

We had a second, brief stop beside the Arrocampo Reservoir where there were two **Northern Banded Groundlings**, a **Long Skimmer** and a large number of **Iberian Bluetails**, including several mating pairs. We reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo ready to enjoy an evening meal.



Northern Banded Groundling (Delia)

18th June 2023: Alcollarín Reservoir and Zorita.



Alcollarín Reservoir (Martin)

It was a hot sunny day and we headed south to the nearby reservoir of Alcollarín. This relatively new water body is surrounded by open woodland. We made a first stop on the western shore, just as a large flock of sheep were coming down to drink. **Little Ringed Plovers** and a **Common Sandpiper** were present, as well as some noisy **Egyptian Geese**. The rushes beside the water were full of **Iberian Bluetails** and as the air got warmer the number of **Northern Banded Groundlings** increased. We also found **Red-veined Darters**.



Red-veined Darter (Delia)

Proceeding then to a smaller body of water, where **Kingfishers**, **Great Reed Warblers** and **Purple Heron** were present, we found **Violet Dropwing**, as well as more **Iberian Bluetails**. A **Migrant Spreadwing** was found at the edge of the woodland. A **Blue Emperor** patrolled a small patch of water. We had our picnic nearby and after visiting the northern end of the reservoir we returned to the western shore. The wind had picked up a bit, and no additional species were found.

We moved then to the River Alcollarín below the dam. A female **Broad Scarlet** was ovipositing. We saw several **Hoopoes** and **Iberian Magpies**. A **Booted Eagle** flew over being mobbed by **Lesser Kestrels**. We made a final stop beside a small pond south of Zorita. Here **Black-tailed** and **Long Skimmers** were seen briefly, **Violet Dropwing** and **Iberian Bluetails** were present, as were the almost omnipresent **Northern Banded Groundlings**. There were many **Small Red-eyes** and a single **Blue-eye** damselfly also seen.

19th June 2023: Arroyo de la Vid, Ibor River and Castañar del Ibor.



Orange Featherleg (Martin)

We explored the area to the north-east. Stopping first beside the Arroyo de la Vid near Jaraicejo, we almost immediately found one of our sought-after species, an **Orange Featherleg**. An **Iberian Bluetail** was also present.

From there we headed eastwards towards the Villuercas-Ibores Mountains, which we admired initially from a distance: a wonderful succession of ridges. We stopped beside the Ibor River, close to Castañar del Ibor, and spent the rest of the morning there. We found several **Large Pincertails**, including two recently emerged females, had some superb views of **Western Spectre**, a **Keeled Skimmer** and saw two **Demoiselle** species: **Copper** and **Western**. In the trees **Golden Oriole** called and we also saw a **Short-toed Eagle**. We also watched a courting pair of **Iberian Grass Snakes** swimming across the pool.

After our picnic, we walked on trail south of Castañar del Ibor, with nice views of **Broad-bodied Chaser**, as well as **Beautiful Demoiselle** and **Common Goldenring**.

We completed the afternoon beside the Rio de Viejas. Here there were both **Pincertail** species, offering us excellent views.



Western Spectre (Martin)



Copper Demoiselle (Martin)



Large Pincertail (Martin)

20th June 2023: River Ruercas and River Almonte

A rather cloudy and cool day today, although there was some more sunshine in the afternoon. We spent the first part of the morning beside the River Ruercas near Cañamero, a beautiful river set between rocky outcrops and forest. The weather probably was the reason why we failed to find any dragonflies, but we did have great views of **Kingfisher** and enjoyed a very pleasant walk. After coffee in the pretty village of Berzocana we headed north to the River Almonte, close to the village of Retamosa. Here the river passes through a spectacular gorge where Griffon Vultures nest. At last we did find some dragonflies: three species of **Demoiselle** to be precise. We had a picnic near the River Almonte close to the town of Aldeacentenera and then spent the afternoon close the river near the Count's Bridge. We had excellent views of both **Pincertail** species here as well as an **Epaulet Skimmer**.

21st June 2023: River Guadiana near Don Álvaro, Mérida and Medellín.

There was high light cloud, an occasional light shower and then mostly sunshine in the afternoon. We explored an area in central Extremadura, making several stops along Guadiana River. First was close to Don Álvaro, where we found **White Featherlegs**, **Blue-eyes**, and the friendly **Northern Banded Groundlings**. We moved then to the Roman Bridge at Mérida where we also had our picnic. The bridge, the longest Roman Bridge in the world, is a beautiful structure and a wonderful place to survey the river and its surrounds. Walking beside the river we found **Violet Dropwing**, **Black-tailed Skimmer**, and of course **Northern Banded Groundlings**.



Aqueduct of Los Milagros (Martin)

We stopped beside the spectacular Roman Aqueduct of Los Milagros, complete with nesting **White Storks**, including a chick making its first practice flights and **Glossy Ibis** feeding in the canal below it. Our final stop was upstream on the Guadiana, at the town of Medellín: here we walked a short distance along edge of river and there were numerous **Iberian Bluetails** mating.



Iberian Bluetail (Martin)

22nd June 2023: Malpartida de Cáceres and El Parque de Príncipe in Cáceres.

The weather had changed and we enjoyed sunshine and warm to hot temperatures all day. We travelled to the west, stopping first at pools to the east of Malpartida de Cáceres. The conditions were excellent, the pools full of water and straightway we were watching throngs of **Small Spreadwings**. Gradually other dragonflies appeared, mostly very recently emerged **Darters** (both **Southern** and **Common**).



Southern Darter (Martin)

We then came across a newly emerged emperor dragonfly. The colours were still very pale so it was not clear which species it was. But photos were taken. Shortly after that we saw a female **Black Percher**, an excellent find. At the car to have refreshments we checked the emperor photos and were delighted to see that it was indeed a **Vagrant Emperor**. It is very rare to prove that breeding had taken place, so a great find! Luckily the beauty was still resting where we had left it, so giving us a second opportunity to watch it. Back at the pools we found several more **Black Perchers**, including at least three males. Three species of **darter** were also seen: **Southern**, **Common** and **Red-veined**. It had been an excellent morning!



Vagrant Emperor (Martin)



Black Percher (Martin)

We moved on to the Barruecos Natural Monument to have refreshments, admiring the Vostell sculpture of a MIG fighter jet, complete with nests of **White Storks**. The afternoon was spent successfully at the urban Principe Park in Cáceres. An **Orange-winged Dropwing** was seen, as well as a skimmer sp, but the highlights were the opportunities to photograph birds like **Iberian Magpie**, **Hawfinch** and **Hoopoe** at close range, as well as **Grey Wagtail**. A good view was also had of a **Viperine Snake**.

23rd June 2023: Monfragüe, Las Mestas and Casatejada.

It was another hot and sunny day. Delia on her pre-breakfast walk had a wonderful encounter with a **Hoopoe**. We set off just before 09.00, stopping a couple of times to photograph the extraordinary flowery pastures, almost unique for this time of the year, thanks to the wet spell in early June.



Dehesa in bloom (Martin)

We headed north through an unbroken *dehesa* landscape, arriving at the Monfragüe National Park. We made a stop at the famous Salto de Gitano viewpoint, seeing **Black Stork** chicks on the nest as well as young **Griffon Vultures**. Four **White-rumped Swifts** were also seen. We then headed north on the long journey to Las Hurdes in the extreme north-west of Extremadura. This journey took us past Plasencia, beside the Gredos Mountains, across a vast olive-producing landscape and then pine forests as we approached our destination. This was the village of Las Mestas. We had refreshments at the famous honey shop there and then started our dragonfly observations on the Ladrillar River.



Orange-spotted Emerald (Martin)

Fairly quickly we were seeing **Orange-spotted Emeralds** and we devoted a lot of time to try to photograph them in flight. We were also lucky enough to see a mating pair perched. Occasionally a **Splendid Cruiser** passed by, but it was not until later in the afternoon that we had a chance to have more prolonged views of this rare dragonfly.



Orange Featherlegs and White Featherlegs (Delia)

A charming sight was pair of **White-legged Featherlegs** and a pair of **Orange Featherlegs** mating on the same floating twig. Birds seen included a **Dipper** and a **Cirl Bunting**. It was a lovely spot and well worth dedicating most of the day for.

On our return we made a stop at the small gravel pit near Casatejada where we had made our first stop on our arrival from Madrid.



Green Hooktail (Martin)

The highlight here was, without doubt, a **Green Hooktail**, a much-sought after species. We were delighted. A **Long Skimmer**, **Violet Dropwing** and **Northern Banded Groundlings** were also present. With the temperatures still in the high 30s, it was time to complete our journey for the final evening at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

24th June 2023: Alcollarín and return to Madrid.

With another hot and sunny day in store, we returned to the Alcollarín Reservoir, close to base to enjoy this beautiful location again. **Red-eyed** damselflies and multitudes of **Iberian Blue-tails** were present, as well **Northern Banded Groundlings** and more **Red-veined Darters** than we had seen previously. A **Long Skimmer** and **Violet Dropwing** was also seen. We also saw a **Southern Water Vole** briefly, probably the first ever record for that site.

The heat clearly discouraged birds from sitting out in the open, but we did have nice views of **Thekla Larks**, Bee-eaters and **Woodchat Shrike**. A **Zitting Cisticola** was very obliging. Beside the water there were **Little Terns** and **Black-winged Stilts** amongst other species. As the temperature rose so approached the time for our departure. We returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo for a bite to eat and to pack the car. It was then a very smooth drive to Madrid where late afternoon Delia checked into her hotel.



Red-eyed Damselfly (Delia)

List of Odonata seen

Given the cool, wet weather that preceded the holiday and the continuation of overcast and unsettled weather on the first few days, the total number of species seen was very satisfactory. The focus of the holiday was not a big list, more like opportunities for photography.

1. **Copper Demoiselle:** On Ibor and Ruercas Rivers.
2. **Beautiful Demoiselle:** On Ibor, Ruercas and Ladrillar Rivers.
3. **Western Demoiselle:** On Ibor, Ruercas and Ladrillar Rivers.
4. **Migrant Spreadwing:** At Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.
5. **Small Spreadwing:** At Malpartida de Cáceres.
6. **Blue-eye:** Seen almost every day.
7. **Small Red-eye:** Near Zorita and at Alcollarín.
8. **Iberian Bluetail:** Seen every day.
9. **Orange Featherleg:** Near Jaraicejo and at las Mestas.
10. **White Featherleg:** Seen most days.
11. **Vagrant Emperor:** A newly emerged male at Malpartida de Cáceres.
12. **Blue Emperor:** At Alcollarín.
13. **Western Spectre:** On Ibor and Ladrillar Rivers.
14. **Small Pincertail:** On De Viejas and Almonte Rivers.
15. **Large Pincertail:** On Ibor, Almonte and Ladrillar Rivers.
16. **Green Hooktail:** Near Casatejada.

17. **Common Goldenring**: Near Castañar del Ibor.
18. **Splendid Cruiser**: On Ladrillar River.
19. **Orange-spotted Emerald**: On Ladrillar River.
20. **Northern Banded Groundling**: Seen most days.
21. **Broad Scarlet**: Seen on four days.
22. **Black Percher**: At Malpartida de Cáceres.
23. **Broad-bodied Chaser**: Near Castañar del Ibor.
24. **Black-tailed Skimmer**: Near Zorita and Guadiana River.
25. **Epaulet Skimmer**: On Almonte River.
26. **Keeled Skimmer**: On Ibor River.
27. **Long Skimmer**: Seen on four days.
28. **Red-veined Darter**: Seen at Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.
29. **Common Darter**: At Malpartida de Cáceres.
30. **Southern Darter**: At Malpartida de Cáceres.
31. **Orange-winged Dropwing**: Seen in Cáceres.
32. **Violet Dropwing**: Seen most days.