

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



AN INTRODUCTION TO EXTREMADURA IN LATE SPRING FOR ANNA AND JAMIE

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

1st – 8th May 2023



The sound of silence

Itinerary

1st May 2023: Transfer from Madrid and stop at Arrocampo.

2nd May 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca

3rd May 2023: Monfragüe National Park

4th May 2023: Madrigalejo, Cañamero, Villuercas Mountains and Garciaz

5th May 2023: Plains east of Cáceres and Alcollarín Reservoir.

6th May 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and Piornal mountains

7th May 2023: Jaraicejo cork oaks and Castañar del Ibor.

8th May 2023: Return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

1st May 2023: Transfer from Madrid and stop at Arrocampo

Martin met Ann and Jamie outside the Ibis hotel in Barajas at 11.00 on a sunny morning in Madrid. We made our way around the southern ring road to take the motorway southwards to Extremadura. There was very slow traffic for the first fifteen or so kilometres, but after that we were soon quickly driving through the vast arable plains of Castille La Mancha, with the Toledo Mountains to the south and the Gredos to the north. From the halfway point we started to see the *dehesa* landscape, as well as birds such as **White Storks**. In Extremadura we stopped for sandwiches just outside Saucedilla and then spent an excellent couple (albeit hot) hours beside the marsh of the Arrocampo Reservoir. We watched **Purple Herons** coming to land, **Purple Swamphens** feeding on stalks, **Savi's Warblers** singing and **Gull-billed Terns** flying past. All the time a couple of **Spoonbills** were busy feeding. Overhead **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** and **Black Kites** passed over, joined at one moment by a stunning **Booted Eagle**.



Booted Eagle

A short stop at another section of marsh offered us the chance to see **Squacco Heron** and **Black-crowned Night Heron**, as well as four dragonfly species, including **Violet Dropwing** and the engrossing **Northern Banded Groundling**.

From there we continued our journey, reaching Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 5pm to the sound of a **Nightingale** singing.

2nd May 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca

A very warm day, with high cloud which gradually got thicker during the afternoon. There were occasional periods of light breeze which gave us some respite. We set off at 8.00 and stopped

first on the plains just west of Trujillo. The vast expanse looked yellow and dusty, testament to a brutal drought. We stopped to a wall of sound, as **Calandra Larks** sang on all sides.



Calandra Lark

Crested and **Thekla Larks** were also present, and we had superb views of all three species. A female **Little Bustard** was watched, crouching pheasant-like as she ran through the grass. Spectacularly two **Great Bustards** flew past at close range, an excellent opportunity to appreciate their size. A **Spanish Imperial Eagle** sat in a tree, and we saw small groups of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** coming down to drink.



Great Bustard

In another area, east of Cáceres, we had lovely views of **Roller** and **Little Owl**, as well as a hovering **Lesser Kestrel**. A **Great Bustard** was watched as it foraged in the grass. A party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flew past. Added to our lark list, were **Greater Short-toed Larks** which sang above us. A **Short-toed Eagle** sat on a nearby pylon and groups of **Black Kites** arrived to feed on the masses of small grasshoppers.

After coffee at Santa Marta de Magasca, we stopped beside the River Tamuja where we were treated to the spectacular sight of a displaying **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, sky-dancing and barking above us. **Bee-eaters** foraged. North of the village, beside the Magasca River, we had a picnic, watching **Woodchat Shrike** “flycatching” above us. **Crag Martins** glided around the bridge and **Spanish Terrapins** basked in the sun.

We rose again to the plains and had a short walk on a drover’s trail. By now, the heat had become fiercer and having had such a productive day so far, we decided to make a retreat back to base, to the shade and the swimming pool.

3rd May 2023: Monfragüe National Park

It was another hot day, but with a fresher north-easterly breeze. We headed north from Trujillo across a vast landscape of *dehesa*, as far as the eye could see, wood pasture with trees, every one of them shaped by people. Crossing two river valleys we slowly descended towards the valley of the Tagus itself, abruptly framed by the quartzite ridges of Monfragüe. Our first stop was a lovely walk to the Castle, from which we could admire the landscape that we had crossed, as well as the series of ridges northwards, with the Gredos Mountains in the distance. The trees were dominated by holm oak, cork oak and wild olive on the ridge, with a luxurious mix of species on the north facing slope, including strawberry tree, Montpellier maple, narrow-leaved ash and Portuguese oak. We had a close view of a male **Rock Bunting** and at the castle fly-bys at eye level of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**.



Rock Bunting

We descended to the viewpoint of Salto de Gitano, looking across to the massive Peña Falcon cliff, home to many pairs of nesting **Griffon Vultures**. Here too we saw a nest of **Black Stork** with newly hatched chicks. A **Blue Rock Thrush** sat and sang and preened for a long time. **Crag Martins** whizzed around our heads and we had a another close **Rock Bunting**. **Egyptian Vultures** also appeared and a distant **Peregrine**. Pausing by the Tagus bridge, we were surrounded by throngs of **House Martins** and several **Alpine Swifts**.



Griffon Vulture

After coffee in the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos, we made our way along the Tiétar valley, pausing to have our picnic overlooking the river. Here too **Black Storks** were in view. **Thekla Larks** sang in the scrub. We continued to the Portilla del Tiétar at the northern edge of the park. A fine **Subalpine Warbler** gave us great views. An **Egyptian Vulture** was watched on its nest and we enjoyed further views of vultures.

On our return, we found a pair of **Black-eared Wheatears** and then we took a walk beside the Tagus where several butterfly species were seen including **Large Tortoiseshell**, **Two-tailed Pasha**, **Nettle-tree butterfly** and **False Ilex Hairstreak**. An **Osprey** flew high overhead, whilst a **Booted Eagle** soared at rather lower height.

We made a short return stop at the Salto de Gitano, as some of the **Griffon Vultures** were heading back to the colony after their day's foray.

4th May 2023: Madrigalejo, Cañamero, Villuercas Mountains and Garciaz

It was a warm sunny day, with a pleasant light breeze most of the day. We took the road south, past Zorita whereupon we spotted two male **Great Bustards** close to the road. We watched them in excellent light as they slowly moved into loner vegetation. A **Great Spotted Cuckoo** was seen briefly in flight.



Black-winged Kite

We entered the rice fields area near Madrigalejo where we had a very productive first stop along a road, with fruit orchards on one side and rough pasture with scattered trees on the other. We had superb views of three **Black-winged Kites**, both perched and in flight. At one time a bird was being mobbed by almost ten **Iberian Magpies**. We also had superb views of **Iberian Grey Shrike**. Other species included **Little Owl**, **Hoopoe**, **Bee-eaters** and **Sardinian Warbler**.



Dehesa near Logrosán

We drove up into a wonderful *dehesa* landscape, towards the town of Logrosán. From there we made an ascent, with Pyrenean oak starting to make an appearance, to the town of

Cañamero. Just outside, the Reiver Ruercas cuts a deep gorge and there we walked. The lush vegetation was a stark contrast to the arid plains near Trujillo. Here **Blackcaps** sang, an **Iberian Green Woodpecker** sat obliging atop a dead branch and we watched two male **Dippers** in territorial dispute.



Dipper

Wrens, Cetti's Warblers and **Nightingales** sang around us. Above us were **Crag Martins, Red-rumped Swallows** and briefly two **White-rumped Swifts**. A pair of **Blue Rock Thrushes** also looked down on us.



Common Swallowtail

We continued our ascent, past Guadalupe to the peak of the Villuercas. We paused to look at an old snow well and to admire the scrub vegetation, several species of rock rose and heaths in flower. A **Common Kestrel** mobbed a **Raven**. At the peak, we were afforded extraordinary

views across Extremadura and beyond. The geology was fascinating and animals included **Rock Buntings**, **Black Redstarts**, **Egyptian Vulture**, **Queen of Spain Fritillary** and a splendid **Common Swallowtail** butterfly.

We descended and stopped at the charming village of Berzocana for coffee and then continued to the pine woods and strawberry tree groves north of Garciaz. Here we found several species of butterfly including **Spanish Gatekeeper** and **Red-underwing Skipper**. **Crested Tits** called and a **Woodlark** sang briefly. A **Broad-leaved Helleborine** was in flower.

It was then a quite short journey back to base, a very satisfying and varied day.

5th May 2023: Plains east of Cáceres and Alcollarín Reservoir.



Little Bustard and sandgrouse plains

We returned to the plains east of Cáceres, seeing a foraging **Great Bustard** almost as soon as we had entered the area. **Rollers** and **Short-toed Eagles** followed suit. We took a dirt road for several kilometres, stopping to watch no fewer than four **Hoopoes** foraging together. Onward until we started seeing sandgrouse in flight. We stopped for a scan and were amply rewarded by the enchanting sight of a displaying **Little Bustard**. What a privilege! A **Great Bustard** flew over and we had flight views of both **Black-bellied** and **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. Eventually we managed a view of two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** on the ground, but Pin-tailed eluded us. Luckily, we had several good flight views of them. As we started to return a female **Montagu's Harrier** was watched drifting over the fields. We also had a magnificent view of an **Ocellated Lizard**.

We stopped for coffee near Campo Lugar and then spent the rest of the day at the Alcollarín Reservoir. On arriving we saw a **Large Psammodromus** lizard. On the shoreline there were a number of waders present, including **Kentish Plover**, **Little Stint** and **Ruff**, but best of all were the views of nearly twenty **Collared Pratincoles**, which we watched on the ground and also flying over.



Collared Pratincoles

Our picnic was to the sound of two, perhaps three, **Great Reed Warblers** singing. Again, after some effort we managed to get views of one which obligingly sang from a dead tree.



Alcollarín Reservoir

During the afternoon we had good views of **Bee-eaters** and **Woodchat Shrikes** and enjoyed the scenery around the water. We completed the afternoon at the edge of Alcollarín village, enjoying watching about half a dozen **Lesser Kestrels** and **Common Swifts**.

6th May 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and Piornal mountains

Our first stop was a return to the Arrocampo Reservoir, this time at a different part of the marsh where we had a fabulous start of the day. Probably six different **Little Bitterns** were seen, including a female and a male fishing (successfully). About nine **Black-crowned Night Herons** were seen both in flight and perched. Added to that, were several **Purple Heron**, **Kingfisher**, as well as three species of egrets and **Glossy Ibis**.



Black-crowned Night Heron

It was now time to continue northwards, crossing first the floodplain of the Tiétar valley where fields were being planted with peppers and tobacco, then to the town of Jaraiz, centre of the smoked paprika industry. It was surrounded by terraces of cherry trees. We ascended through Pyrenean oak until reaching the broom moorlands above the town of Piornal.



Mountains near Piornal

The views were extraordinary: across the colourful mountain top (yellow and white brooms, lavender, heaths in flower), grey rounded granite boulders, a blue sky, across to distant mountain ranges to the south across the vast Tagus plain.

One of the most profound sensations was the complete lack of human or mechanical sound. Save the song of **Ortolan Buntings** and **Woodlarks** there was a deep silence. As well as the buntings and larks, we had lovely views of **Spectacled** and **Dartford Warblers**, **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Dunnocks** and **Common Whitethroats**. A **Golden Eagle** soared into view.



Ortolan Bunting

We encountered three species of lizard including a superb **Schrieber's Green Lizard** and several **Guadarrama Wall Lizards**. **Queen of Spain Fritillaries** were everywhere, but we also found **Marsh Fritillary**, **Knapweed Fritillary** and **Green Hairstreak**.



Schrieber's Green Lizard

Following our picnic we spent an hour so in a belt of pine trees where **Western Bonelli's Warblers** were singing and **Crested Tits** were feeding nestlings. We completed our visit with coffee in Piornal, where a large colony of **Pallid Swifts** wheeled overhead.

7th May 2023: Jaraicejo cork oaks and Castañar del Ibor.

Starting closer to home, we had a wonderful morning walking in a cork oak grove north of Jaraicejo. The calm weather, gradually warming up during the day, made it perfect conditions to be in woodland, listening to the sound of birds around us: **Nightingales, Short-toed Treecreepers, Turtle Doves, Western Orphean Warblers**....The architecture of the cork oaks, shaped and harvested by generations of people, growing on the gentle hillside, gave one perspective and depth which made the place very special. The trees themselves are superb resources for birds, as befitted the diversity of species we recorded, such as **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Golden Oriole, Crested Tit** and **Woodchat Shrike**. We watched a delightful **Short-toed Treecreeper** bringing food to its nest hole in a dead small branch of a cork oak.



Cork oak grove

Close to the Arroyo de la Vid, we watched **Western Orphean Warbler** collecting food for its young, and a **Subalpine Warbler** doing the same. A **Melodious Warbler** was also present. A **Geniez's Wall Lizard** showed on a bridge as did a **Large Psammmodromus**. On a nearby meadow, we watched a **Viperine Snake**.

At coffee, the herpetology continued, with a **Moorish Gecko** hiding in a rubbish bin!

We then drove into the Ibor valley and stopped for lunch at a viewpoint giving an impressive view across the valley to crags. **White-rumped** and **Common Swifts** wheeled overhead, as well as **Red-rumped Swallows**.



Two-tailed Pasha

The afternoon was spent on a lovely walk from Castañar del Ibor, through sweet chestnut and deciduous oak groves. The butterflies were superb, especially a **Two-tailed Pasha**, and **Amanda's Blue** and a **Southern White Admiral**. Birds included Melodious Warbler and Firecrests.



Amanda's Blue

At the end of the walk we reached a huge ancient sweet chestnut tree, estimated to be 700 years old.



Singular sweet chestnut

8th May 2023: Return to Madrid

A sad farewell from Casa Rural el Recuerdo just before 9.00 and we headed up the motorway for Madrid. Birds en route included **Hoopoe**, **Black Kite**, **White Stork** and the now daily **Grey Heron**. We stopped for coffee just over halfway through the journey and arrived at the airport just before midday.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

Birds

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on three days.
2. **Gadwall**: Seen on pools on the plains and Alcollarín.
3. **Mallard**: Seen on three days.
4. **Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín.
5. **Ferruginous Duck**: Seen at Arrocampo.
6. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on four days.
7. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Arrocampo.
8. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín.
9. **Great Cormorant**: Seen on two days.
10. **Little Bittern**: Excellent views at Arrocampo.
11. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen on both visits to Arrocampo.
12. **Squacco Heron**: One seen at Arrocampo.
13. **Cattle Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo.
14. **Little Egret**: Seen on three days.
15. **Great Egret**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.

16. **Grey Heron:** Seen daily.
17. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo.
18. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
19. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
20. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Arrocampo.
21. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
22. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen on two days.
23. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen every day.
24. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
25. **Osprey:** Seen at Monfragüe.
26. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on the plains.
27. **Golden Eagle:** Seen near Piornal.
28. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen on four days.
29. **Booted Eagle:** Seen on three days.
30. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
31. **Red Kite:** Seen almost daily.
32. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on three days.
33. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen on the plains east of Cáceres.
34. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
35. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen at Madrigalejo.
36. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen on two days.
37. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on one day.
38. **Peregrine:** Seen at Monfragüe.
39. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo.
40. **Moorhen:** Seen on three days.
41. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
42. **Little Bustard:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo and east of Cáceres.
43. **Great Bustard:** Seen on three days.
44. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on two days.
45. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen at Alcollarín.
46. **Common Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín.
47. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín.
48. **Kentish Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín.
49. **Northern Lapwing:** Small group present at Alcollarín.
50. **Little Stint:** Present at Alcollarín.
51. **Ruff:** Present at Alcollarín, including a male with "ruffs"
52. **Common Redshank:** Seen at Alcollarín.
53. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín.
54. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen at Arrocampo.
55. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains.
56. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains.
57. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
58. **Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
59. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
60. **Turtle Dove:** Heard at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
61. **Common Cuckoo:** Seen or heard almost every day.
62. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen near Madrigalejo.
63. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains.

64. **Red-necked Nightjar**: Calling on two evenings.
65. **Alpine Swift**: Seen at Monfragüe.
66. **Common Swift**: Seen most days.
67. **Pallid Swift**: Seen on two days.
68. **White-rumped Swift**: Seen near Cañamero and in Ibor valley.
69. **Kingfisher**: Seen on three days.
70. **Bee-eater**: Seen almost daily.
71. **Roller**: Seen on plains east of Cáceres.
72. **Hoopoe**: Seen almost daily.
73. **Iberian Green Woodpecker**: Seen near Cañamero.
74. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Heard on two days.
75. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen near Jaraicejo.
76. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on the plains.
77. **Greater Short-toed Lark**: Seen on the plains.
78. **Crested Lark**: Seen most days.
79. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on almost daily.
80. **Woodlark**: Seen near Piornal, Jaraicejo and at Castañar del Ibor.
81. **Crag Martin**: Seen most days.
82. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
83. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Seen almost daily.
84. **House Martin**: Seen most days.
85. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen near Cañamero.
86. **White Wagtail**: Seen almost daily.
87. **Wren**: Recorded almost daily.
88. **Dipper**: Seen near Cañamero.
89. **Dunnock**: Seen near Piornal.
90. **Robin**: Seen on three days.
91. **Nightingale**: Recorded almost daily.
92. **Black Redstart**: Seen almost daily.
93. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily.
94. **Black-eared Wheatear**: Seen at Monfragüe and near Piornal.
95. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Monfragüe and near Cañamero.
96. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
97. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on several days.
98. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen most days.
99. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen almost daily.
100. **Savi's Warbler**: Seen at Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
101. **Reed Warbler**: Seen at Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
102. **Great Reed Warbler**: Seen at Alcollarín.
103. **Melodious Warbler**: Seen at Jaraicejo and Castañar del Ibor.
104. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen near Piornal.
105. **Spectacled Warbler**: Seen near Piornal.
106. **Subalpine Warbler**: Seen at Monfragüe and near Jaraicejo.
107. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen near Madrigalejo
108. **Western Orphean Warbler**: Seen near Jaraicejo.
109. **Common Whitethroat**: Seen near Piornal.
110. **Blackcap**: Seen on two days.
111. **Western Bonelli's Warbler**: Seen near Piornal.

112. **Firecrest:** Singing near Piornal and Castañar del Ibor.
113. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
114. **Crested Tit:** Seen near Piornal and Jaraicejo.
115. **Coal Tit:** Singing near Piornal.
116. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
117. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
118. **Bearded Tit:** Heard at Arrocampo.
119. **Nuthatch:** Seen at Castañar del Ibor.
120. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen on three days.
121. **Golden Oriole:** Seen or heard almost daily.
122. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen near Madrigalejo
123. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
124. **Jay:** Seen on three days.
125. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
126. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
127. **Jackdaw:** Seen on three days.
128. **Raven:** Seen most days.
129. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
130. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
131. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on most days.
132. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
133. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
134. **Greenfinch:** Seen near Jaraicejo.
135. **Goldfinch:** Seen most days.
136. **Linnet:** Seen on two days.
137. **Rock Bunting:** Seen on two days.
138. **Ortolan Bunting:** Seen near Piornal.
139. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Other wildlife

Butterflies

1. Red-underwing Skipper
2. Spanish Festoon
3. Swallowtail
4. Bath White
5. Small White
6. Large White
7. Clouded Yellow
8. Cleopatra
9. Small Copper
10. Sooty Copper
11. Green Hairstreak
12. False Ilex Hairstreak
13. Brown Argus
14. Black-eyed Blue
15. Lang's Short-tailed Blue

16. Long-tailed Blue
17. Amanda's Blue
18. Holly Blue
19. Nettle Tree Butterfly
20. Cardinal Fritillary
21. Queen of Spain Fritillary
22. Knapweed Fritillary
23. Marsh Fritillary
24. Red Admiral
25. Southern White Admiral
26. Large Tortoiseshell
27. Small Tortoiseshell
28. Two-tailed Pasha
29. Speckled Wood
30. Spanish Gatekeeper
31. Small Heath
32. Wall Brown
33. Meadow Brown

Dragonflies and Damselflies

1. Beautiful Demoiselle
2. Iberian Bluetail
3. Blue-eye
4. Dainty Bluet
5. Blue Emperor
6. Black-tailed Skimmer
7. Violet Dropwing
8. Scarlet Darter
9. Red-veined Darter
10. Northern Banded Groundling

Reptiles

1. Large Psammodromus
2. Western Psammodromus
3. Ocellated Lizard
4. Shrieber's Green Lizard
5. Guadarrama Wall Lizard
6. Geniez's Wall Lizard
7. Moorish Gecko
8. Spanish Terrapin
9. Viperine Snake
10. Iberian Water Frog

Misc invertebrates

1. Egyptian Grasshopper
2. Red-striped Oil Beetle

3. Cuckoo Wasp
4. Violet Carpenter Bee
5. Chimney Sweep Moth
6. A spoonwing (*Nemoptera bipennis*)

Orchids

Broad-leaved Helleborine

Common Tongue Orchid

Lang's Orchid

Other flora

Wild Gladiolus

Wild Tulip

Wild Peony

Shrubby Pimpernel