

BIRDING EXTREMADURA

AN INTRODUCTION TO EXTREMADURA AND THE GREDOS IN LATE SPRING FOR JUDY

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

25th – 31st May 2023



Itinerary

25th May 2023: Transfer from Madrid and stop at Arrocampo.

26th May 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Trujillo, Alcollarín and rice fields near Palazuelo

27th May 2023: Madrigalejo, Don Benito, Medellín, Roman Bridge Mérida, Alange.

28th May 2023: Monfragüe National Park

29th May 2023: Gredos Mountains.

30th May 2023: Gredos Mountains.

31st May 2023: Return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

25th May 2023: Transfer from Madrid and stop at Arrocampo.

Martin met Judy at the airport shortly after 10.00 on a sunny morning in Madrid. We made our way around the southern ring road to take the motorway southwards to Extremadura. 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 few hours beside the marsh of the Arrocampo Reservoir. We watched **Purple Herons** coming to land, **Purple Swamphens**, a **Little Bittern** fishing, **Ferruginous Duck** with ducklings, a **Spoonbill** busy feeding. Overhead **Marsh Harriers** and **Black Kites** passed over and **Zitting Cisticolas** performed their song-flights.

A short stop at another section of marsh offered us the chance to see **Squacco Heron** and as well as dragonfly species, including **Violet Dropwing** and the engrossing **Northern Banded Groundling**. Strikingly-plumaged **Spanish Sparrows** assembled in a tree.

From there we continued our journey, reaching Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 5pm, with **Iberian Magpies** feeding on ripe mulberry bushes in the property.

26th May 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Trujillo, Alcollarín and rice fields near Palazuelo



Little Owl

A day of dodging thunderstorms, which we did more or less successfully. The skies often were very threatening, but the only short shower was experienced whilst we were driving. We spent the morning on the plains west of Trujillo, passing a bedraggled **Booted Eagle**, stopping first of

all at a vantage point from which as well as enjoying the surround sound of **Calandra Larks**, we saw a perched **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, **Montagu's Harrier**, both species of **Cuckoo** and some **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. Good views of **Woodchat** and **Iberian Grey Shrike** were also enjoyed. We chanced upon three male **Great Bustards**, excellent views as they foraged in the long grass. Nearby we watched **Spanish** and **Rock Sparrows**, as well as **Iberian Magpies**. Then to an area south-west of the village of Santa Marta de Magsca. **Rollers** were seen, as well as **Little Owls**, **Short-toed Eagles** and singing **Short-toed Larks**. We had good views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** in flight.



Roller

After coffee in Santa Marta de Magsca, we returned to Trujillo, stopping to look at the **Lesser Kestrel** colony on the old silo building.

After a stop to buy some of the famous Iberian Ham, we proceeded south to the Alcollarín Reservoir for our picnic. At the picnic area we watched **Great Crested** and Little Grebes, and a frenzy of action when **Great Reed Warblers** and a **Sardinian Warbler** were mobbing a feral cat. **Kingfishers** also gave us good views. Along the shore of the reservoir we saw **Collared Pratincole** and a pair of **Little Tern**.

We spent the rest of the afternoon on the rice-fields near Palazuelo, which were gradually being flooded for the season. Despite the late date, there was still a remarkable number of passage waders present. The dominant species being **Common Ringed Plover** with over 300 birds seen. Also seen were **Kentish Plover**, **Grey Plover**, **Northern Lapwing**, **Little Stint** and **Sanderling**. **Yellow Wagtails** were present and we also saw **Short-toed Larks** and **Tree Sparrows**.

As we returned to base with black clouds to our backs, it was clear that there had been heavy rain indeed at Pago de San Clemente, we were indeed extremely fortunate.

27th May 2023: Madrigalejo, Don Benito, Medellín, Roman Bridge Mérida, Alange.

It was generally a wet day, no dramatic thunderstorms, but a leaden sky and prolonged rain. We started in dry conditions near Madrigalejo where we had good views of three **Black-winged Kites**, **Bee-eater**, **Hoopoes** and **Iberian Grey Shrikes**. The rain soon commenced as we left and our stop at the gravel pits at Don Benito was largely thwarted. We did stop at a rice field on the way to our next stop, where there was a large party of **Common Ringed Plover** and three **Sanderling**.

We had coffee beside the old bridge at Medellín and then proceeded to the even older bridge in Mérida. The Roman Bridge there is the longest in the world and over two thousand years old, yet it provided an excellent vantage point to watch an amazing 35 species of birds, including **Purple Swamphen** feeding morsels of fish to a chick, a **Little Bittern** catching and eating a crayfish, **Alpine Swifts**, and a wonderful selection of herons and egrets. We also had a fabulous view of a **Penduline Tit**. Best of all, we enjoyed it all with no rain.



Little Bittern

At Alange dam we had our picnic, again with **Alpine Swifts** wheeling overhead. We walked beside the reservoir, having views of **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Thekla Lark**, but onset of rain forced our retreat. Being mid-afternoon, we decided that we had had a good run for the day, and with the rain looking set-in, we returned a little earlier than usual to base.

28th May 2023: Monfragüe National Park



Peña Falcón

We set off from Casa Rural El Recuerdo following early morning rain and a leaden sky. We stopped in Trujillo to watch **Pallid Swifts** coming into their nest site above a garage. Martin then voted in the municipal elections. 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 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 three chicks and adults sitting on two other nests. A **Blue Rock Thrush** sat on a rock. **Crag Martins** whizzed around our heads and we watched **Rock Bunting** and **Black Redstart**. A distant **Peregrine** appeared.

To the north, we had lovely views of a **Subalpine Warbler**, just before our stop for coffee in the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos. After that we made our way along the Tiétar valley, pausing to admire the geology and then making a short walk where we were rewarded by excellent views of **Western Black-eared Wheatear**, **Subalpine Warbler** and a **Bonelli's Eagle** soaring. Nearby two noisy **Short-toed Eagles** were also in flight.



Short-toed Eagle

We enjoyed our picnic overlooking the Tiétar River, watching a **Wild Boar** foraging. An **Egyptian Vulture** was watched on its nest further upstream. Stopping at the Portilla del Tiétar, and we enjoyed further views of vultures, especially as they opened their wings to dry their plumage. A **Spanish Imperial Eagle** soared into view and we also saw **Cirl** and **Rock Buntings**. In the cork oak groves nearby, a **Western Orphean Warbler** was singing.

We then made the two-hour drive into the Gredos Mountains, there was hill mist at the pass and we reached the Hostel Almanzor at 18.20, with a welcome evening meal as we sat by the log fire.

29th May 2023: Gredos Mountains

Before breakfast we took a look at the ingenious hide built inside the very hotel. **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and **Chaffinches** were paying a visit to the feeding stations there. We drove to the high carpark of the Plataforma. It was dry initially, but it misted over and rain started to fall. We enjoyed views of **Spanish Ibex**, **Northern Wheatears** and “Iberian” **Dunnocks** before deciding to descend. **Skylarks** sang around us. We had a very brief view of a **Bluethroat** in the rain. **Ortolan Buntings** and **Rock Buntings** were also present close to the path, which had been built in the 1950s for General Franco to get to the high ground to shoot ibex.

We had coffee in Hoyos del Espino and then drove to the mountains to the north, to stop at the pass of Peña Negra. Here we quickly found a beautiful singing **Bluethroat** which we watched for some time.



Bluethroat

We returned to Hoyos de Espino, to have a picnic close to the Tormes River and then to explore the woodland there. We found a fine male **Pied Flycatcher**, a splendid male **Red-backed Shrike**, **Black Redstarts**, **Western Bonelli's Warblers** and **Firecrest**.



Red-backed Shrike

We completed the afternoon back in the hide, where several species of birds arrived, including **Jay** and **Nuthatch**, a **Fox** came in for a piece of chicken and a **Common Chiffchaff** was in song.

30th May 2023: Gredos Mountains

A wonderful, final full day, with periods of rain if anything adding to the magic, shrouds of mist crossing the landscape and glorious respites when birds appeared with a bounce of activity when the rain abated.

We returned to the Plataforma, not walking very far from the car park, watching several groups of **Spanish Ibex**. Like yesterday, we were the very first people there! **Ortolan Buntings** sang around us and we got views of **Common Rock Thrush** and **Water Pipit**. **Northern Wheatears** were nest building close to the path. We descended in the rain, and watched a **Common Snipe** calling as it perched on a fence post. Following coffee, we drove through the pinewoods near Navarredonda, beautiful but because of the rain, quite quiet bird wise. By the time we stopped for our picnic, the rain had passed though, and a **Pied Flycatcher** came out to feed.



The Gredos

At a viewpoint near Hoyos del Espino, we watched a nice collection of birds of prey: **Hobby**, **Griffon Vulture**, **Short-toed Eagle**, **Booted Eagle**, **Red Kite** and **Black Kite**, but then the rain arrived again so we adjourned to the hotel. It was a short stop, however, since in true April-showers style, the sun came out. We went for walk in the pinewoods at Navarredona, getting great views of **Western Bonelli's Warblers** and **Citril Finches**. We completed the afternoon at the viewpoint again as butterflies were starting to come out in the late afternoon sunshine. At one moment, a **Honey Buzzard**, **Hobby** and **Black Kite** were soaring peacefully together just above our heads.



Honey Buzzard

Back at the hotel, we sat in on the launch of the new book of photos and poetry by our host and then enjoyed a very pleasant dinner by the logfire again.

31st May 2023: Return to Madrid

We set off just before 09.00 from the Hostel and returned to Madrid via a northern route, enabling us to pass the beautiful walled-city of Ávila.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

Birds

1. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín.
2. **Mallard:** Seen on three days.
3. **Ferruginous Duck:** Seen at Arrocampo.
4. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen at Madrigalejo.
5. **Quail:** Heard on the rice-fields.
6. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
7. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín.
8. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on three days.
9. **Little Bittern:** Excellent views at both Arrocampo and Mérida.
10. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen at Mérida.
11. **Squacco Heron:** One seen at Arrocampo.
12. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on four days.
13. **Little Egret:** Seen on three days.
14. **Great Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.

15. **Grey Heron:** Seen on three days.
16. **Purple Heron:** Seen on three days.
17. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe.
18. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
19. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
20. **Spoonbill:** Seen on three days.
21. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen at Monfragüe.
22. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
23. **Black Vulture:** Seen on three days.
24. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on the plains and at Monfragüe.
25. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Seen at Monfragüe.
26. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen on four days.
27. **Booted Eagle:** Seen on three days.
28. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
29. **Red Kite:** Seen almost daily.
30. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on three days.
31. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen on the plains east of Cáceres.
32. **Common Buzzard:** Seen most days.
33. **Honey Buzzard:** One in the Gredos.
34. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen at Madrigalejo.
35. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen at Trujillo.
36. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on two days.
37. **Hobby:** Seen in the Gredos.
38. **Peregrine:** Seen at Monfragüe.
39. **Moorhen:** Seen at Mérida.
40. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
41. **Common Coot:** Seen at Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
42. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo.
43. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at Alcollarín.
44. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen at Alcollarín.
45. **Common Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín and on the rice fields.
46. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín and Monfragüe.
47. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields on two days.
48. **Grey Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
49. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen on the rice fields.
50. **Sanderling:** Seen on the rice fields on two days.
51. **Dunlin:** Seen on the rice fields.
52. **Little Stint:** Seen on the rice fields.
53. **Common Snipe:** One seen in the Gredos.
54. **Common Redshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
55. **Greenshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
56. **Black Tern:** Three seen on the rice fields.
57. **Little Tern:** Seen at Alcollarín.
58. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
59. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains.
60. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains.
61. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
62. **Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.

63. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
64. **Turtle Dove:** Seen at Monfragüe.
65. **Common Cuckoo:** Seen or heard almost every day.
66. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen on the plains.
67. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains.
68. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Mérida.
69. **Common Swift:** Seen most days.
70. **Pallid Swift:** Seen at Trujillo.
71. **Kingfisher:** Seen at Alcollarín.
72. **Bee-eater:** Seen almost daily.
73. **Roller:** Seen on plains east of Cáceres.
74. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
75. **Iberian Green Woodpecker:** Heard in the Gredos.
76. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen in the Gredos.
77. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
78. **Greater Short-toed Lark:** Seen on the plains.
79. **Crested Lark:** Seen most days.
80. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
81. **Woodlark:** Singing in the Gredos.
82. **Skylark:** Singing in the Gredos.
83. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
84. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
85. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen almost daily.
86. **House Martin:** Seen most days.
87. **Water Pipit:** Seen in the Gredos.
88. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on rice fields and Gredos.
89. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen in the Gredos.
90. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
91. **Wren:** Recorded on three days.
92. **Dunnock:** Seen on the Gredos.
93. **Robin:** Seen on three days.
94. **Bluethroat:** Seen in the Gredos.
95. **Nightingale:** Recorded almost daily.
96. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
97. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
98. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen in the Gredos.
99. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen at Monfragüe.
100. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
101. **Common Rock Thrush:** Seen in the Gredos.
102. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
103. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe.
104. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen on three days.
105. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen on three days.
106. **Savi's Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo.
107. **Reed Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo, Alcollarín and Mérida.
108. **Great Reed Warbler:** Seen on three days.
109. **Melodious Warbler:** Seen on three days.
110. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on two days.

111. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Monfragüe.
112. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen on three days.
113. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Seen in Monfragüe.
114. **Common Whitethroat:** Seen in the Gredos.
115. **Blackcap:** Seen on two days.
116. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** Seen in the Gredos.
117. **Common Chiffchaff:** Singing in the Gredos.
118. **Firecrest:** Singing in the Gredos.
119. **Pied Flycatcher:** Seen in the Gredos.
120. **Crested Tit:** Seen in the Gredos.
121. **Coal Tit:** Seen in the Gredos.
122. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
123. **Nuthatch:** Seen in the Gredos.
124. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen on two days.
125. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Mérida.
126. **Golden Oriole:** Seen at Mérida.
127. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen on two days.
128. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen on two days.
129. **Red-backed Shrike:** Seen in the Gredos.
130. **Jay:** Seen on two days.
131. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen almost daily.
132. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
133. **Jackdaw:** Seen on three days.
134. **Carrion Crow:** Seen in the Gredos.
135. **Raven:** Seen most days.
136. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
137. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
138. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on three days.
139. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
140. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on plains.
141. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
142. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
143. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
144. **Greenfinch:** Seen on two days.
145. **Citril Finch:** Seen in the Gredos.
146. **Goldfinch:** Seen most days.
147. **Linnet:** Seen on two days.
148. **Hawfinch:** Seen in Monfragüe.
149. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
150. **Rock Bunting:** Seen on three days.
151. **Ortolan Bunting:** Seen in the Gredos.
152. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

Other wildlife

Red Deer

Wild Boar

Spanish Ibex

Rabbit

Red Fox