

BIRDING EXTREMADURA

SPRING HOLIDAY TO EXTREMADURA FOR GEORGE AND LESLEY

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

30th March – 5th April 2023



Itinerary

30th March 2023: Transfer from Madrid

31st March 2023: Arrocampo and Almaráz Hill

1st April 2023: Alange and surrounds.

2nd April 2023: Around Madrigalejo and Alcollarín

3rd April 2023: Sierra de San Pedro and Malpartida de Cáceres

4th April 2023: Madrigalejo, Alcollarín and Madroñera

5th April 2023: Plains east of Cáceres, Sierra de Mosca and Parque de Principe, Cáceres

12th April 2023: Collection from Cáceres and Garciaz woodland

All photos by George and Lesley, unless indicated otherwise.

TRIP REPORT

30th March 2023: Transfer from Madrid

French air traffic control strikes delayed the arrival of George and Lesley's flight, and it was not until 22.45 that we set off from the airport. We made the journey to Casa Rural El Recuerdo non-stop, arriving at 01.30.

31st March 2023: Arrocampo and Almaráz Hill



Naked Man Orchid

After the late arrival we had an easy morning, setting off at about 10.30 to the reservoir of Arrocampo. It was fairly windy and overcast (there had even been some drizzle on the journey), but we had a very rewarding morning watching **Purple Herons, Great Spotted Cuckoos, Black and Griffon Vultures, Zitting Cisticolas** amongst other species. The **Purple Herons** were particularly enjoyable, coming into land close in front of us and stretching their serpentine necks straight. A **Savi's Warbler** sang in view, perched tightly on a reed which swung in the wind. We watched a male **Lesser Kestrel** as it glided overhead.

We had lunch in an area of *dehesa*, close to the marsh near Almaraz where **Little Owls** were calling. We spent the rest of the afternoon on the Almaraz hill finding no fewer than eight species of orchids in the olive groves. The raptors were also enthralling, especially the displaying **Booted Eagles**. **Red-rumped Swallows** offered close views. Butterflies included **Cleopatra** and **Spanish Festoon**.

1st April 2023: Alange and surrounds.

It was a day of generally blue skies. But with some periods of cloud and a fresh wind during the afternoon. As we set off we paused to watch the **Crag Martins**, along with **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Barn Swallows** collecting mud from the road in the village. We then drove southwestwards, to the heart of Extremadura, entering the province of Badajoz and the basin of the Guadiana River towards Mérida. We stopped in a beautiful area of wooded scrub to photograph **Common Tongue** orchids. **Woodlarks** and **Thekla Larks** were singing and a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** was singing as it passed through.



Bumblebee Orchid

We then stopped beside the village of Alange and made the steep and rough path towards the castle on the northern slope of the outcrop. Here we eventually came across a wonderful orchid meadow with a variety of species, in which pride of place went to the **Bumblebee Orchids**, also present were **Pink Butterfly, Conical, Sawfly, Early Spider, Woodcock** and **Yellow Bee**. A pair of **Egyptian Vultures** often passed overhead, a **Blue Rock Thrush** sang as did a **Rock Bunting**.



Early Spider Orchid

After coffee, we then drove east of the village to the Jabata Valley. After a lunch in a beautiful setting, we made the steep walk up the hillside, stopping to admire **Green-winged, Champagne Orchids** and **Lusitanian Fritillaries**. **Thekla Larks** sang all around us.



Heart-flowered Tongue Orchids

We found at the top of the slope a glorious colony of **Heart-flowered Tongue Orchids**, flowers opening in full splendour. It was a memorable encounter and drew the day to a fitting climax.

However, just to complete the day's birding a shopping stop in Trujillo gave us the chance to see both **Lesser Kestrels** and a roosting **Scops Owl**.

2nd April 2023: Around Madrigalejo and Alcollarín

A warm sunny day again with clear skies, with just a slight breeze freshening up during the afternoon.



Black-winged Kite

We started the morning near the town of Madrigalejo having superb and prolonged views of at least three **Black-winged Kites**. A wonderful supporting cast included **Purple Heron, Great Spotted Cuckoos, Bee-eaters** and both **Iberian Grey** and **Woodchat Shrikes**. It was an excellent start to the day. We then stopped by the River Ruercas, seeing some distant **Collared Pratincoles** and displaying **Marsh Harriers**. After an excellent coffee near Campo Lugar we spent the rest of the day at the Alcollarín Reservoir.

We obtained excellent views of four species of Odonata: **Vagrant Emperor, Western Clubtail, Iberian Bluetail** and **Blueyes**. These kept us entertained for some time. The birds were also good though, with **Spoonbill, Great Egrets**, a variety of duck and waders (including **Spotted Redshank, Little Stint** and **Ruff**).

3rd April 2023: Sierra de San Pedro and Malpartida de Cáceres



Spanish Imperial Eagle

A very early start with departure at 05.40 to rendezvous with Helios of Photo Raptors in the heart of the Sierra de San Pedro near Salorino. Leaving our car at the layby, Helios drive us along a dirt track into an estate, eventually stopping at a scrubby hillside. The sun had not yet risen as we made our way up a small path, surrounded by the song of **Dartford**, **Subalpine** and **Sardinian Warblers**. Ensnared in the hide, it did not take long before the bait of a dead rabbit had attracted a pair of **Ravens**. Then, as the sun was lighting up the far side of the gentle valley, we saw the form of a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** glide over the hide. Seconds later it reappeared and settled on the perch, taking some morsels of the meat. It was an awe inspiring first close encounter with this majestic bird. It stayed for just a couple of minutes but was back again about 15 minutes later, albeit briefly. The sun was gradually rising, and we were now also getting views of some of the warblers around us.



Spanish Imperial Eagle

About half an hour later the eagle arrived for its third and as it transpired last appearance, but this time fully lit up by the morning sunshine. It was a truly excellent and memorable moment, now immortalized in a series of photos of this majestic bird.

We waited a further hour, but the eagle did not return. However, the time past watching warblers, a **Crested Tit**, the wonderful landscape stretching to Portugal and a **Moorish Gecko** in the hide.

Following our pick-up we repaired to a nearby Casa Rural for coffee and home-made sponge cake. We then thanked Helios warmly and head back east, making a stop at the wetland near Malpartida de Cáceres where there was a selection of birds including an adult **Spoonbill**, a passage of **Ruff** and **Greenshank**. We had an excellent lunch in the town and then made another stop to the east of the town, to spend an hour or so watching dragonflies in some pools set in a rolling granitic landscape. As well as **Vagrant Emperors**, there were also **Blue-eyes**, **Iberian Blue Tails**, **Red-veined Darters** and a Clubtail, sp.

4th April 2023: Madrigalejo, Alcollarín and Madroñera

We set off early to give ourselves good photography light along the Madrigalejo road. Here we saw no fewer than five different **Black-winged Kites** and had a series of very good views of perched and flying birds. Again, both species of Shrikes offered us rewarding sightings. A male **Montagu's Harrier** swept over an olive plantation. An **Egyptian Mongoose** gave us a distant but good view.

We then stopped beside the ploughed fields to the north-west where a party of about twenty **Collared Pratincoles** were present and they flew past a couple of times in good light. It was great watching these aerobatic birds swooping close to us and giving their twittering calls.

We had coffee near Campo Lugar and then stopped at the village of Alcollarín to watch the **Lesser Kestrel** colony. At lunch beside the reservoir a male **Common Redstart** was taking advantage of a large number of small flies that were present in the clearing. **Vagrant Emperors** were again present beside the reed mace.

We spent the afternoon on a pleasant walk on heath above Madroñera. Perhaps the best sighting was of a **Three-toed Skink**, a remarkable view. There were also **Dartford Warblers**, **Thekla Larks**, **Short-toed Eagles**, butterflies such as **Western Dappled White** and **Brown Argus**, a **Queen of Spain Fritillary** and unexpectedly, a **Pink Butterfly Orchid**.



Three-toed Skink

5th April 2023: Plains east of Cáceres, Sierra de Mosca and Parque de Principe, Cáceres



Sierra de Mosca (Martin Kelsey)

A change of landscape today, onto the plains east of Cáceres, where we made our first stop watching a displaying **Great Bustard**. A group of **Griffon Vultures** stood stooped on rocks nearby. We then took a dirt track and seemingly miles from anywhere, stopped and quickly found not one, not even two, but three male **Little Bustards** and two females. We had an amazing time, watching the **Little Bustards** display, preen, feed and in flight on pursuits. It was unforgettable. A male **Great Bustard** was also in the vicinity, and we heard **Pin-trailed Sandgrouse** as well. We continued on the plains, seeing **Short-toed Lark**, a **Tawny Pipit**, **Little Owl** and a **Roller**. The birds of prey were really excellent: two **Montagu's Harriers**, a **Booted Eagle**, **Black** and **Red Kites** as well as **Black** and **Griffon Vultures**. Many made fly-bys close by as we stood at a good vantage point.

After coffee near Sierra de Fuentes, we spent the rest of the morning on a limestone hillside. In scrub and woodland, we saw several **Spanish Festoons** and a **Cleopatra** amongst other butterflies and also a few orchids such as **Ophrys dyris**, **Conical**, **Naked Man** and **Sawfly**.



Spanish Festoon

The spent the afternoon in the Parque de Principe in the centre of Cáceres, a lovely park where had close views of numerous **Iberian Magpies**, a singing **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Pallid** and **Common Swifts**. George and Lesley then picked up their hire car for their independent birding for the next few days.

6th – 11th April Independent

George and Lesley made very good use of their second week in Extremadura. This included a very special encounter with an Eagle Owl and further observations of Black-winged Kites.



Eagle Owl

12th April 2023: Collection from Cáceres and Garciaz woodland

Martin picked up George and Lesley from Cáceres early afternoon. We made a brief visit to the Guadiloba Reservoir nearby, seeing **Little Ringed Plover**. We then drove on to the village of Garciaz, climbing to a wooded area where amongst pines and sweet chestnut groves we found a few flowering spikes of **Dense-flowered Orchid** – an exquisite little plant. The views across to the Villuercas Mountains were spectacular. It was then back to Casa Rural El Recuerdo to pack.

13th April 2023: Return to Madrid.

Shortly after 09.00 we set off for the return to Madrid, arriving at about midday, following a stop for coffee just over halfway.