

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SPRING HOLIDAY FOR JOHN AND DEBORAH

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

12th April – 20th April 2024



Itinerary

12th April 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport

13th April 2024: Jaraicejo, Pico de Miravete, Trujillo and Alcollarín Reservoir

14th April 2024: Sierra Brava, Casas del Hitos, Vegas Altas, Palazuelo

15th April 2024: Garciaz

16th April 2024: Jaraicejo, Alcollarín Reservoir and the rice fields

17th April 2024: The rice fields, Mérida, Alange, Don Benito

18th April 2024: Monfragüe National Park

19th April 2024: Plains near Esparragosa de Lares, Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, Palazuelo and Alcollarín

20th April 2024: Arrocampo and return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

12th April 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport

Martin met John and Deborah at an extremely busy Terminal 4 of Madrid airport and the ring road was no different: traffic was very slow with long tailbacks because of a couple of accidents. Once we were on the motorway heading for Extremadura, we were caught in the late Friday afternoon exodus, so despite not making a single stop on the journey, the drive took us almost four hours, instead of the usual two and a half to three hours. Dinner was ready on arrival and after such a long day, it was an early night.

13th April 2024: Jaraicejo, Pico de Miravete, Trujillo and Alcollarín Reservoir

Refreshed, we set off at about 08.45 under almost cloudless skies and with the promise of a hot day ahead. We spent the first part of the morning on the beautiful heathland plateau near Jaraicejo where **Dartford Warblers** were very active and we saw two male **Spectacled Warblers** singing. A **Tawny Pipit** on the track was also great. **Thekla Larks** sang around us and groups of **Bee-eaters** flew overhead.



Nearby, beside the Arroyo de la Vid, we saw **Subalpine Warbler**, whilst **Nightingales** belted out their song, in competition with **Cetti's Warblers**. After coffee, we drove up to the Miravete Pass, where we had our picnic in the shade of a grove of elm trees, frequented by **Short-toed Treecreepers**, whilst **Griffon Vultures** passed overhead. The views were superb, northwards to the Gredos Mountains, still with snow and south across the *dehesas* and plains to Trujillo.



It was to Trujillo we went next, to find and enjoy the sight of two roosting **Scops Owls**. We then drove south to the Alcollarín Reservoir, where we spent the rest of the afternoon, now quite hot. We found some shade to stand in on the western shore of the lake. Here there was a **Black-necked Grebe** in breeding plumage, and a group of four **Whiskered Terns**, along with a few ducks (**Mallard, Wigeon, Gadwall** and **Shoveler**) and waders (**Greenshank, Common Sandpiper** and **Black-winged Stilt**).



14th April 2024: Sierra Brava, Casas del Hitos, Vegas Altas, Palazuelo

It was another hot and sunny day and we moved southwards to the rice fields, with a stop first of all at Sierra Brava reservoir, where a **Roller** flew alongside the car. On the rice fields near Casas del Hitos we saw several **Iberian Yellow Wagtails** (which would be a recurring encounter throughout the day) and a group of **Blue-headed Wagtails** as well. A little bit further on we watched a **Black-winged Kite** bringing nest lining material to its nest, where its mate was sitting. A **Great Spotted Cuckoo** was heard and several **Bee-eaters** seen. We moved to the area near Vegas Altas, where wagtails sang from the stems of tall plants. We had a good coffee in the village and then moved to the area near Palazuelo.

Reed Warblers and **Cetti's Warblers**, along with **Nightingales** sang from river Ruercas. We came across a field which held an extraordinary number of **Wood Sandpipers**: 66 birds (the highest number ever recorded in Extremadura). There were also several **Ruff** and **Redshank**. We had our picnic there, as it offered one of the very few places with shade. Afterwards we continued through the rice fields there, finding two nests of **Kentish Plover** along the tracks where we carefully drove, and numerous **Iberian Yellow Wagtails**. As we were returning home, we spotted another field with waders, including a large group of **Black-winged Stilts**.

Closer inspection revealed a **Curlew Sandpiper** getting into summer plumage, more **Wood Sandpipers**, a **Lapwing** and, especially exciting, two **Marsh Sandpipers**, a local rarity.

15th April 2024: Garciaz



The hot and sunny weather continued today and so we sought refuge to the hills around Garciaz, just 20 km from base. We enjoyed an initial walk in an open Pyrenean oak *dehesa*. Here we had excellent views of **Hawfinch** and **Rock Sparrow** and an amazing **Common Cuckoo** which sat perched, motionless, as we were photographing her. We reckoned that she must have had an eye on a potential nest, so concentrated she seemed.



Just down the road we heard a **Wryneck** singing, but only John got a brief glimpses of it. Not that further away, we found another **Wryneck**, which perched briefly in view. In contrast, the **Nightingales** were singing at full volume, and often sitting right out in the open.

After coffee in the village, we climbed to an area of pine woodland where we had our picnic. It was a bit cooler here, and **Crested Tits** were present, as well as **Short-toed Treecreepers**. A pair of **Golden Eagles** were sky-dancing overhead.

We made a gradual return to base, via a quiet road to Madroñera. This crossed a stream and passed through *dehesas* of deciduous and evergreen oaks. This habitat was good for **Rock Sparrows**, and we heard **Western Orphean Warbler** and **Golden Oriole**.

16th April 2024: Jaraicejo, Alcollarín Reservoir and the rice fields

Another hot and sunny day, with very little wind, but with a slight haze. Before breakfast we visited the heath land of Jaraicejo and spent a wonderful hour from sunrise, watching a **Spectacled Warbler** and several **Dartford Warblers**, along with **Corn Buntings** and **Thekla Larks**. The visit was a very evocative one, the colours of the heath in the morning light being especially beautiful.



After breakfast we went to the Alcollarín Reservoir, spending the morning on the eastern shore. **Bee-eaters** and **Woodchat Shrikes** were especially numerous, but we also saw **Gull-billed Tern**, more egrets than on our previous visit, heard **Savi's** and **Great Reed Warblers**, and watched displaying **Great Crested Grebes**.



Following the picnic, we ventured onto the rice fields for a reccy for a few hours in the afternoon, seeing several **Iberian Yellow Warblers**, but far fewer waders than on our previous visit, although **Wood Sandpipers** were still the most numerous.



Returning to Alcollarín at the end of the afternoon, we admired a fine breeding plumage male **Ruff**, which stood beside a **Greenshank** and **Common Sandpiper**.

17th April 2024: The rice fields, Mérida, Alange, Don Benito

There was a slightly more of a breeze today, but still it was a fine, sunny and hot day. We started on the rice fields hoping to photograph **Yellow Wagtails**. Although we saw several, none were as cooperative as expected. We did see a few waders: **Wood Sandpiper**, **Greenshank** and **Redshank** and a group of **Lesser Kestrels** following a tractor.

We then drove south-west to the capital of Extremadura to see the Roman bridge in Mérida and walk across it birding and then explore the riverside park. The swifts were amazing. **Alpine** and **Pallid Swift**. Groups of **Glossy Ibis** flew overhead. **Golden Orioles** called from the poplar trees. In the park we found a singing **Western Bonelli's Warbler** and a female **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**. We reached an egret colony where nests had chicks of **Cattle Egret**; **Glossy Ibis** and **Black-crowned Night Heron** also had nests. **Penduline Tits** flew across the bridge on our return. Close to where we had parked, we found two migrant **Pied Flycatchers**.



We continued south to Alange. After coffee we had our picnic near the dam, watching more **Alpine Swifts** and a **Black Wheatear**.

On our way back, we stopped for a walk near the Guadiana River at Don Benito, where **Penduline Tits** and **Great Reed Warblers** were present. A pair of **Western Swamphens** had two large chicks. From there, near Miajadas, we came across several wet fields with nesting **Black-winged Stilts** and a few migrant waders such as **Common Snipe** and **Wood Sandpiper**.



18th April 2024: Monfragüe National Park

There was some high cloud, but generally the day was hot and sunny, although there was a fresher breeze from the east. We spent the whole day in the Monfragüe National Park. We focused in the morning on **Black-eared Wheatears**, finding a pair close to the Tajadilla picnic area. We had several prolonged views of both male and female, including hearing the male's rather quiet and simple song.

We had coffee at the northern edge of the park, beside cork oak trees. A female **Montagu's Harrier** flew over as we were leaving and there was a rather distant snatch of **Western Orphean Warbler** song. We then spent some time at the Portilla del Tietar viewpoint, where there were four **Black Storks** and a rather distant **Spanish Eagle** as we left. We had a picnic at the belt of pines, affording a good high vantage point.

We concluded the day with a lovely long session at the Salto de Gitano, again watching **Black Storks** and **Egyptian Vultures**, numerous **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and a **Rock Bunting** bringing food to chick in a nest. **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Crag Martins** swooped around us.

19th April 2024: Plains near Esparragosa de Lares, Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, Palazuelo and Alcollarín

The day was forecast to be cooler and cloudier, and indeed we had softer lighting through much of the day, but there was still plenty of sunshine. We drove directly to an old drovers' trail near the village of Esparragosa de Lares where we spent a very productive first half of the morning.



It was wonderful being out in the first hours of daylight on the plains there, with the air full of the song of **Greater Short-toed Larks** and **Calandra Larks**, the occasional bubbling calls of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flying high overhead and the vast views with bluish distant sierras. We found our sought-after species almost immediately and had good views of several **Montagu's Harriers**, including a pair involving a food-pass and a copulation. A bonus was a calling **Little Bustard** at quite close range.



We then returned northwards to Madrigalejo and stopped at rice fields just north of the town where we found a large number of **Collared Pratincoles**. They were flying close by, but the light was not brilliant for watching them on the ground, so we withdrew and stopped for a coffee nearby. Moving to Moheda Alta, we had our picnic in the shade of a tree at the edge of a flower-rich *dehesa* and paid a brief visit to the nearby dam where a long-staying male **Common Scoter** was still present.



We returned to the pratincole area, but still the combination of lighting and where the birds were resting was not ideal. So we withdrew again and paid a visit to one of the muddy fields that we had been checking during the week. There were still a few **Wood Sandpiper** and **Ringed Plovers** present. Back again at the pratincoles, this time our patience paid off. With much better light conditions, we found a pair that was courtship feeding and displaying on the ground not far from the track. Satisfied with our experience we headed across the plains of Campo Lugar, stopping to watch a calling **Greater Short-toed Lark**. We made a visit to another muddy rice field, where we found a flock of 13 Whimbrel resting in the middle of the field. We made our final stop at Alcollarín, to watch a group of **Spoonbills**, two remaining drake **Wigeon** and a fine **Black-necked Grebe**.

20th April 2024: Arrocampo and return to Madrid

There was a pre-dawn thunderstorm and some rain which made for a wonderful reddish eastern sky. After breakfast, we bade our farewells to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and then headed up the motorway for our birding stop at the Arrocampo Reservoir. Whilst John focused on photographing **Savi's** and **Cetti's Warblers**, Deborah and Martin watched from the hide. We had a full and rewarding hour or so there, with lovely views of **Western Swamphen** and **Purple**

Heron, several **Ferruginous Duck**, egrets and even two distant **Black-winged Kites**. **Savi's Warblers** and **Great Reed Warblers** sang from the tops of the reeds.

Just after 10.00, it was time to pack away the equipment and make the return to Madrid. Following a refreshment stop at the halfway point, we reached Terminal 4 at 12.30.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

BIRDS

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on five days.
2. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín.
4. **Mallard**: Seen almost everyday.
5. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín.
6. **Ferruginous Duck**: Seen at Arrocampo.
7. **Common Scoter**: A drake at Moheda Alta.
8. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen most days.
9. **Quail**: Heard at Moheda Alta.
10. **Little Grebe**: Seen on four days.
11. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín, Alange and Mérida.
12. **Black-necked Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín.
13. **Great Cormorant**: Seen on six days.
14. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen at Mérida.
15. **Cattle Egret**: Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
16. **Little Egret**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
17. **Great Egret**: Seen on five days.
18. **Grey Heron**: Seen on six days.
19. **Purple Heron**: Seen at Alcollarín, Mérida and Arrocampo.
20. **Black Stork**: Seen at Monfragüe.
21. **White Stork**: Seen every day.
22. **Glossy Ibis**: Seen on four days.
23. **Spoonbill**: Seen on five days.
24. **Black-winged Kite**: A pair seen near Madrigalejo and at Arrocampo.
25. **Black Kite**: seen daily.
26. **Red Kite**: Seen almost daily.
27. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen in Monfragüe.
28. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen daily.
29. **Black Vulture**: Seen on three days.
30. **Short-toed Eagle**: Seen on three days.
31. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost daily.
32. **Montagu's Harrier**: Seen on three days.
33. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen on one day.
34. **Common Buzzard**: Seen on three days.
35. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Seen in Monfragüe.
36. **Golden Eagle**: Seen near Garciaz.
37. **Booted Eagle**: Seen almost every day.
38. **Lesser Kestrel**: Seen almost every day.

39. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on one day.
40. **Merlin:** Seen at Palazuelo rice fields.
41. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo.
42. **Moorhen:** Seen on five days.
43. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo, Alcollarín, Don Benito and Mérida.
44. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
45. **Little Bustard:** Seen on the plains near Esparragosa de Lares.
46. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on five days.
47. **Stone Curlew:** Recorded on two days.
48. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen near Madrigalejo.
49. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
50. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on most days.
51. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
52. **Northern Lapwing:** One seen on the rice fields.
53. **Curlew Sandpiper:** One seen on the rice fields.
54. **Ruff:** Seen at Alcollarín and the rice fields.
55. **Common Snipe:** Two seen near Miajadas.
56. **Common Redshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
57. **Greenshank:** Seen at Alcollarín and the rice fields.
58. **Marsh Sandpiper:** Two, almost certainly three, seen on the rice fields.
59. **Wood Sandpiper:** One of the commonest waders on the rice fields.
60. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen on the rice fields and Alcollarín.
61. **Whimbrel:** Group of 13 seen on the rice fields.
62. **Whiskered Tern:** Four seen at Alcollarín.
63. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen at Arrocampo, Alange and Alcollarín.
64. **Little Tern:** Seen at Alcollarín.
65. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on two days.
66. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen at Esparragosa de Lares.
67. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
68. **Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
69. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
70. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Heard at Madrigalejo and seen from the road on three days.
71. **Common Cuckoo:** Seen on most days.
72. **Scops Owl:** Seen in Trujillo.
73. **Little Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente.
74. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange, Mérida and Monfragüe.
75. **Common Swift:** Seen on four days.
76. **Pallid Swift:** Seen at Mérida.
77. **Kingfisher:** Seen on three days.
78. **Bee-eater:** Seen every day.
79. **Roller:** Seen near Sierra Brava.
80. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
81. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard at Garciaz and seen in Mérida.
82. **Wryneck:** Two at Garciaz.
83. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains and Jaraicejo.
84. **Greater Short-toed Lark:** Seen on the rice fields and plains.
85. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost every day.
86. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost every day.

87. **Woodlark:** Seen on four days.
88. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
89. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
90. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
91. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen almost daily.
92. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
93. **Tawny Pipit:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
94. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on four days.
95. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on one day.
96. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
97. **Robin:** Recorded on two days.
98. **Nightingale:** Seen or heard daily.
99. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
101. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen on four days.
102. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen in Monfragüe.
103. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Alange.
104. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Alange and Monfragüe.
105. **Blackbird:** Seen almost daily.
106. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen on two days.
107. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded daily.
108. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen daily.
109. **Savi's Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
110. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo and Monfragüe.
111. **Spectacled Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
112. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo and Monfragüe.
113. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
114. **Blackcap:** Seen on four days.
115. **Pied Flycatcher:** Seen at Alcollarín and Mérida.
116. **Wren:** Seen most days.
117. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on three days.
118. **Crested Tit:** Seen near Garciaz.
119. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
120. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
121. **Nuthatch:** Heard on two days.
122. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded on three days.
123. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Mérida and Don Benito.
124. **Golden Oriole:** Heard at Monfragüe and Mérida.
125. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
126. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
127. **Jay:** Seen at Garciaz.
128. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
129. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
130. **Jackdaw:** Seen on two days.
131. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
132. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
133. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
134. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.

135. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
136. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Garciaz.
137. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields.
138. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields.
139. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
140. **Serin:** Seen daily.
141. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
142. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
143. **Linnet:** Seen almost daily.
144. **Hawfinch:** Seen on two days.
145. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
146. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.