

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SHORT EARLY SPRING HOLIDAY FOR KATHLEEN AND JILL

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

15th February – 19th February 2024



Watching migrating Common Cranes

Itinerary

15th February 2024: Pick-up at Cáceres Railway Station

16th February 2024: Monfragüe National Park

17th February 2024: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres

18th February 2024: Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo and the rice fields, and Alcollarín Reservoir

19th February 2024: Sierra de Los Lagares and transfer to Cáceres

TRIP REPORT

22nd January 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport.

Martin met Kathleen and Jill at Caceres railway station with their train from Madrid arriving just a few minutes behind schedule. It had rained heavily in the afternoon, but it had cleared as we made our way in the fading light to Trujillo and then south to Pago de San Clemente. After dinner, we listened to the chorus of **Natterjack toads** and one was then seen.

16th February 2024: Monfragüe National Park

It was a misty start of the day, with a gorgeous subdued lighting over the moss and lichen covered granite boulders of the berrocal landscape near Trujillo. As we drove through the huge expanse of *dehesa* north to the National Park of Monfragüe the mist started to clear. We reached the edge of the southern ridge, and drove up to a small car park near the castle. Here we walked to the top of the ridge, affording us superb views north across to the Gredos Mountains, with their highest peaks covered in snow. Before them were the succession of ridges marking the Monfragüe Nation Park. To the south the *dehesa* stretched to the horizon, where we could just make out the form of Trujillo. But it was the multitude of vultures which really caught our attention, both **Griffon** and the huge **Black Vultures**. They glided past, rose on thermals and drifted to the distance. A **Peregrine** soaring with them was completely dwarfed.



View of Peña Falcón from Monfragüe Castle

As we returned to the road, we had a view of a **Golden Eagle** soaring close to the vultures. We then drove through to the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos for a welcome coffee break, then to return to the rocky outcrop below the castle, where Kathleen and Jill had a guided visit of

the rock paintings in a narrow cave below the castle. Here the art spanned 6000 years, the earliest nine and half thousand years old: Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age art. **Crag Martins** flew in the sunshine.

We drove through the park and had our picnic in a belt of elms overlooking the Tíetar River, as **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** soared overhead. A pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** afforded us excellent views.



Angel's Tears Narcissus

Further again at the Portilla del Tietar, Angel's Tears Narcissus were in flower and vultures soared in the sunshine. A **Spanish Eagle** appeared circling in the blue sky.

Returning through the park, we stopped beside the Tagus river to walk beside the north-facing slope with its dense Mediterranean woodland. We had a great view of a **Black Vulture** nest with a pair rearranging the twigs on the platform. **Bosca's Newts** were in the water drinking troughs at the start of the track. We completed our visit at the grand cliff of Peña Falcon, standing in awe as the vultures filled the skies.

17th February 2024: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres

It was a day with real feeling of early spring, with warm sunshine and cloudless skies. We headed west from Trujillo, entering the vast plains, looking stunning with the yellow mantle of wild rocket in flower. We passed a row of nestboxes for Rollers, seeing **Jackdaws**. At our very first stop, we saw a flock of **Great Bustards** flying across the landscape and landing to join others in a field to the east. Scanning in all directions we came across other birds. A male **Hen Harrier** glided over, **Corn Buntings**, **Thekla** and **Calandra Larks** were all singing from the fence, as did a diminutive **Zitting Cisticola**. **White Storks** bill-clacked on a distant colony.



Corn Bunting



Lesser Kestrel

Continuing along the road, we had lovely views of a newly arrived **Lesser Kestrel** and from a small track, we saw **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** and **Golden Plover**.



Migrating Common Cranes

We headed towards the village of Santa Marta de Magsaca, stopping to overlook the Tamuja River. Here we watched a singing **Cirl Bunting**, had brief views of a **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, and an adult **Egyptian Vulture** was much more obliging. However, the highlight was without doubt the evocative sight of hundreds of migrating **Common Cranes**, appearing as skeins far to the south and then approaching us, calling. After an excellent stop for coffee, watching **House Martins** over the village we stopped beside the Magasca River. Here we had our picnic, watching **Crag Martins** and **Spanish Terrapins**. Back on the plains we stopped and saw a Swallowtail butterfly zoom past, as **Red Kites** rose on a thermal, along with an **Egyptian Vulture** and still more **Common Cranes** were passing overhead.

We had an excellent walk along a Cañada Real, seeing a flock of **Little Bustard**, a female **Hen Harrier**, more butterflies, a **Western Pasammmodromus** lizard and plants, including **Least Adder's Tongue**.

We headed back towards Trujillo, seeing several **Iberian Grey Shrikes**, stopping to the admire the beautiful granite landscape pf the *berrocal* and then walking in that landscape where the flowers were staggering, especially luxuriant **Hoop Petticoat Narcissus** and **Star of Bethlehem**. Just before we left we had a wonderful view of a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoos**. A great end to a very satisfying day.



Hoop Petticoat Narcissus

18th February 2024: Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo and the rice fields, and Alcollarín Reservoir

The wonderful spring weather continued. Before leaving we saw the **Stripeless Tree Frog**, resident in the tinaja jar outside the house. We spent the day south of base, in the basin of the Guadiana River, stopping first on the plains south of Zorita, where on piles of stones in the fields we saw **Hoopoes** and a **Little Owl**. In superb light we watched a small group of **Great Bustard** and had the pleasure of seeing several pass close by in flight as well. South from there we entered the rice -growing area near Madrigalejo. In an area of rough pasture and scattered trees we had a lovely view of a **Black-winged Kite**. Several **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were also present. We paused to look at the vast solar thermal plant as well as how some of the rice-growing landscape is being transformed to intensive olive growing. The landscape remains dynamic.

Near the village of Vegas Altas, we were delighted to find several large flocks of **Common Cranes** feeding in rice and maize stubble.

As we headed back northwards, past Madrigalejo, other groups of cranes were embarking on their northward migration. Columns of cranes rising on thermals across the open landscape. The rice fields had flocks of waders such as **Dunlin** and **Ringed Plover**. A tractor working a field had attracted hundreds of gulls, egrets, Spoonbills (included a ringed bird from the Netherlands, as well as **Yellow** and **White Wagtails**).



Great Bustard



Iberian Grey Shrike

Leaving the rice fields we stopped at the edge of Campo Lugar to look at a group of roosting **Stone Curlew**. In the village we stopped for an excellent and well-deserved coffee.

Nearby at Alcollarín we headed up to the dam and spent the rest of the day at the reservoir. The water surface was placid and covered with thousands of wintering **Shoveler** and **Pintail**. It was an extraordinary sight. Despite it being a Sunday with glorious weather, we had the picnic site to ourselves. From there we watched **Vagrant Emperor** dragonflies mating and egg-laying.

We explored part of the eastern shore and western shore of the reservoir. As well as the variety of duck, there were three species of grebe present: **Great Crested**, **Little** and **Black-necked** (the latter with ember-red eyes), **Spoonbill**, **Marsh Harriers** and parties of **Iberian Magpies**.



A fraction of the thousands of ducks at Alcollarín

19th February 2024: Sierra de Los Lagares and transfer to Cáceres

Our final morning, again with warm and sunny weather, was devoted to an exploration of the lanes and old olive groves in the Sierra de Los Lagares, the hills around base. We walked nearly 8 km, along lanes set between mossy and fern-covered stone walls, finding viewpoints from which we could see as far as the Gredos Mountains to the north, Cáceres to the west and across the rice fields and plains of the Guadiana valley southwards. **Swallows** hawked insects above us, whilst there was a constant sound of **Blackcaps**, **Song Thrushes**, **Sardinian Warblers** and **Iberian Magpies** as we walked.



View of San Gregorio from Sierra de los Lagares

The flora was magnificent with **Sage-leaved Cistus**, **Iberian Milk-vetch**, **Dwarf Pansy** and **Hoop Petticoat Narcissus** in flower. We also saw a few butterflies such as **Western Dappled White**, **Queen of Spain Fritillary** and **Wall Brown**. It was also a time to ponder on the story behind the derelict buildings that we passed and see how some had been brought back to dwellings, some very swanky indeed.

It was then time to return home for coffee and a picnic at the large stone table in front of the house. We then set off back to Cáceres, passing through the plains again, with some fields unbelievably yellow with the masses of rocket in flower. Kathleen and Jill checked in at the Iberia Hotel, close to the Main Square, with time in the afternoon to explore the historic centre of the city.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

We did not attempt to chase as many species as possible, but instead to focus on some of the specialities and absorb the great variety of landscapes possible.

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on three days.
3. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
4. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir and on the plains.
5. **Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín.
6. **Mallard**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir and on the plains.
7. **Pintail**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir in huge numbers.
8. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen on two days, huge numbers at Alcollarín.
9. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on three days.

10. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
11. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
12. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
13. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on two days.
14. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on the rice fields.
15. **Little Egret:** Seen on the rice fields.
16. **Great Egret:** Seen on two days.
17. **Grey Heron:** Seen daily.
18. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
19. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen on rice fields.
20. **Spoonbill:** Seen in rice fields and Alcollarín.
21. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
22. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
23. **Cinereous Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
24. **Spanish Eagle:** Seen on the plains and in Monfragüe.
25. **Golden Eagle:** One seen in Monfragüe.
26. **Bonelli's Eagle:** A pair seen in Monfragüe.
27. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
28. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
29. **Hen Harrier:** Seen on the plains.
30. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
31. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen near Madrigalejo.
32. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen on the plains.
33. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on two days.
34. **Peregrine:** One seen in Monfragüe.
35. **Water Rail:** Heard at River Ruercas.
36. **Moorhen:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
37. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
38. **Common Crane:** Seen migrating over the plains and on the rice fields.
39. **Little Bustard:** Seen on the plains.
40. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains east of Cáceres and Campo Lugar Plains.
41. **Stone Curlew:** Seen near Campo Lugar.
42. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
43. **Golden Plover:** Seen on the plains and on the rice fields.
44. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen almost daily.
45. **Dunlin:** Seen on the rice fields.
46. **Common Snipe:** Seen on the rice fields.
47. **Common Redshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
48. **Greenshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
49. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on the plains.
50. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen most days.
51. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on the rice fields.
52. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
53. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
54. **Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
55. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
56. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen north of Trujillo.
57. **Tawny Owl:** Heard on two nights at El Recuerdo.

58. **Little Owl:** Recorded on two days.
59. **Kingfisher:** Seen on two days.
60. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
61. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
62. **Crested Lark:** Seen every day.
63. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
64. **Woodlark:** Seen on near Santa Marta de Magasca and Sierra de los Lagares.
65. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
66. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
67. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen on two days.
68. **House Martin:** Seen on one day.
69. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
70. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields.
71. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
72. **Wren:** Heard on several days.
73. **Robin:** Recorded most days.
74. **Black Redstart:** Seen on two days.
75. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
76. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe.
77. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
78. **Song Thrush:** Seen on two days.
79. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen at Alcollarín.
80. **Zitting Cisticola:** Recorded on two days.
81. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
82. **Blackcap:** Seen daily.
83. **Chiffchaff:** Seen almost daily.
84. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
85. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
86. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
87. **Nuthatch:** Heard on two days.
88. **Short-toed Tree creeper:** Recorded on two days.
89. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen on two days.
90. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
91. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
92. **Jackdaw:** Seen on the plains.
93. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
94. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
95. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
96. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen daily.
97. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields.
98. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields.
99. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Serin:** Seen daily.
101. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
102. **Linnet:** Seen on the plains.
103. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
104. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Mammals

Red Deer

Egyptian Mongoose

Butterflies

Swallowtail

Western Dappled White

Small White

Clouded Yellow

Brimstone

Large Tortoiseshell

Small Heath

Queen of Spain Fritillary

Holly Blue

Small Copper

Wall Brown

Red Admiral

Hummingbird Hawk Moth

Vagrant Emperor

Reptiles and Amphibians

Stripeless Tree Frog

Spanish Water Frog

Natterjack Toad

Spanish Terrapin

Western Psammmodromus

Some plants

Angel's Tears Narcissus

Hoop Petticoat Narcissus

Yellow Star of Bethlehem

Star of Bethlehem

Brown Harebell

Sand Crocus

Amethyst Toadflax

Yellow Toadflax

Meadow Saxifrage

Purple Sand Spurrey

Corn Spurrey

Field Marigold

Paronychia

Mediterranean Catchfly

Common Storksbill

Wall Rocket

Tall Rocket

Wild radish

French Lavander

Spotted Rockrose

Gum Cistus

Sage-leaved Cistus

Least Adder's Tongue Fern