

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SHORT EARLY SPRING HOLIDAY FOR CHAS AND MARY

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

19th March – 23rd March 2024



Itinerary

19th March 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport

20th March 2024: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, Trujillo

21st March 2024: Campo Lugar plains, Sierra Brava Reservoir, the rice fields and Alcollarín Reservoir

22nd March 2024: Belén Plains and Monfragüe National Park

23rd March 2024: Return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

19th March 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport

Martin met Chas and Mary at Madrid airport and we set off at about 15.30 around the southern ring-road and then onto the motorway to Extremadura. A “calima” haze of Sahara dust blotted out distant views. We arrived late afternoon at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, ready for a welcoming meal.

20th March 2024: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, Trujillo

The haze had largely cleared by morning and soon the sky was starting to look blue again! We explored the area between Trujillo and Cáceres, starting in the eastern part, hearing **Common Cuckoo** and seeing groups of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** in flight. It was our first encounter too with larks, so time to look at **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**, as well as soaking in the sound of **Calandra Larks** and **Corn Buntings**. A **Woodchat Shrike** (the first of several during the day) was also seen.

Moving further west, we saw rather distantly a group of eight **Great Bustards** and also a **Short-toed Eagle**. Taking a dirt track, we saw several **Greater Short-toed Larks**. **Lesser Kestrels** hovered over the meadows. We saw a “ring-tail” harrier settle in tall vegetation and waited for it to reappear. As it flew out, it offered us a sideways view. Examination of the photos of the bird showed that it was indeed a second-year **Pallid Harrier**.



It was now time for a well-deserved coffee, so we repaired to Santa Marta de Magasca. Here **House Martins** were busy nest-building. We then had our picnic overlooking the River Tamuja, where we had excellent views of a **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. We continued afterwards on the

plains north of the village, stopping for a walk on an old drovers' trail. Here there were four species of orchid in flower (**Bug, Mirror, Sawfly and Champagne**), whilst just down the road there was also a stand of **Pink Butterfly** orchids. We stopped at the granite boulder landscape north of Trujillo, watching bright **Spanish Sparrows** and a **Thekla Lark** singing on a stone wall.



Entering Trujillo we saw a roosting **Scops Owl** in a small square and then visited the area near the Bull Ring, just as a **Booted Eagle** came by which upset the nesting **Lesser Kestrels** there. We had superb views of both species.



21st March 2024: Campo Lugar plains, Sierra Brava Reservoir, the rice fields and Alcollarín Reservoir

There had been distant thunder during the night, but the day dawned clear, albeit with a strong, gusty breeze.



We headed south, past Zorita and onto the plains near Campo Lugar. Here we were enthralled for an hour watching **Great Bustards**, especially two rival males, who, in perfect light, proceeded to face-off and then entered an argy-bargy scrum. Females nearby were seemingly uninterested, whilst another male was in full display further away in the field. Other birds took a second place to this spectacle, but we also saw **Little Owl**, **Greater Short-toed Lark**, lots of **Calandra Larks** and **Corn Buntings**. Eventually the two males parted company and strode away. That was our cue to move on, and we stopped at the Sierra Brava dam where **Crag Martins** were hawking insects. Nearby we had another memorable encounter for the day, with a wonderful display of decoy behaviour by a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** as it twisted and turned in flight to entice a pair of **Magpies** away from their nest. Meanwhile a female was trying to enter the bush, sometimes spotted by the furious **Magpies**. It was a tremendous insight into the daily life of this species as it seeks to find hosts.



We had coffee in Madrigalejo and then drove across the rice fields. The windy conditions were not conducive to finding small birds and most of the fields were empty, but we did find three **Greater Flamingos**, a **Spoonbill**, **Tree Sparrows**, a **Northern Wheatear** and some very smart **Yellow Wagtails** of two subspecies (the Iberian and the Blue-headed).

We then moved on to our picnic beside the Alcollarín Reservoir, where we spent the rest of the day. **Spoonbills** fed at the edge of the water and **Great Crested Grebes** were in courtship. There was a remarkable number of **Woodchat Shrikes** present (double figures) and a large flock of **Ravens**. **Marsh Harriers** were busy in courtship, and we saw both **Short-toed** and **Bonelli's Eagles**, the latter carrying a prey item.

Waterfowl and waders were also present on the reservoir. The former included **Pintail**, **Gadwall**, **Wigeon** and **Shoveler**, and the latter **Spotted Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Redshank** and **Ruff**. Amongst the flotilla of **Common Coot**, we refound a **Red-knobbed Coot** which had been found by Martin a few days earlier. We had good views of this local rarity.

22nd March 2024: Belén Plains and Monfragüe National Park

The strong south-easterly wind continued for most of the day, bringing with it a shroud of haze of Sahara dust. There was some sunshine in the afternoon, and it felt very warm all day.

We spent the first part of the morning on the plains east and north of Trujillo, but sadly no Little Bustard was located, even at the spot that Martin had heard one two days previously. However, once again we were immersed in lark song and we had an interesting encounter on one of the drovers' trails with a movement of a herd of cattle, complete with two farm workers on horseback.

Then we headed north through a seemingly endless landscape of *dehesa*, stopping at Torrejón El Rubio for coffee and thence to the Monfragüe National Park. We stopped first at the iconic Salto de Gitano viewpoint, looking onwards to the immense quartzite cliff of Peña Falcon, where we did indeed see a pair of **Peregrine Falcons**, involving a food pass from male to female. We also had wonderful views of two pairs of **Black Storks**, wheeling around, calling and landing at their respective nests (one of which it was possible to see an egg). **Griffon**, **Black** and **Egyptian Vultures** were also present, as well as **Blue Rock Thrush**.



Crossing the Tagus River, several **Alpine Swifts** were flying around the bridge. We had our picnic at the Tajadilla viewpoint, seeing a male **Black-eared Wheatear** as we approached, and where as well as the vultures, we had lovely views of several **Siskins** and a **Blue Rock Thrush**. From there we stopped at the Portilla del Tiétar where the highlight was a **Rock Bunting** singing on a rocky outcrop. Returning to the Tajadilla, we found and had prolonged views of a male **Hawfinch**, feeding on elm seeds. Two **Red Deer** were also seen en route.

We moved to the Puerto de Serrana viewpoint, where a **Subalpine Warbler** gave us good views and we watched a pair of **Egyptian Vultures** perched on a rock. By then it was time to make our way back to base.

23rd March 2024: Return to Madrid

After all too short a stay it was time to bid farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and return to Madrid. But not before some final birding at the Arrocampo Reservoir. The hazy calima had returned but there was little wind, so the viewing conditions across the marsh at Saucedilla were good. As soon as we had stopped we heard a **Savi's Warbler**, which we located and watched. About half a dozen **Purple Herons** were seen, in flight and also perched. There were

also **Cattle** and **Little Egret** present. A group of **Glossy Ibis** was seen. On our way to the second stop, we saw a **Sparrowhawk** being mobbed by Barn Swallows, and some roosting **Black-crowned Night Herons** were present.



It was time to set off for the airport, which we reached just after 12.30, with a coffee-stop halfway on the journey. The traffic entering Madrid was very light, in contrast to the very heavy holiday traffic leaving.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

1. **Grey Lag Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín.
2. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
3. **Wigeon:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
4. **Gadwall:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
5. **Teal:** Seen at Alcollarín.
6. **Mallard:** Seen on three days.
7. **Pintail:** Seen at Alcollarín.
8. **Northern Shoveler:** Seen at Alcollarín and on the plains.
9. **Common Shelduck:** Seen at Alcollarín.
10. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on two days.
11. **Quail:** Heard on three days.
12. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín.
13. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín.

14. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín.
15. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on two days.
16. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** A group at Arrocampo.
17. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.
18. **Little Egret:** Seen at Arrocampo.
19. **Great Egret:** Seen on three days.
20. **Grey Heron:** Seen on three days.
21. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo.
22. **Black Stork:** Seen in Monfragüe.
23. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
24. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Arrocampo.
25. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Alcollarín and on the rice fields.
26. **Greater Flamingo:** A group on the rice fields.
27. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
28. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
29. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen in Monfragüe and River Tamuja.
30. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
31. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
32. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen on three days.
33. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on three days.
34. **Pallid Harrier:** One seen on the plains.
35. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen at Arrocampo.
36. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
37. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen at River Tamuja.
38. **Booted Eagle:** Seen on two days.
39. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Seen at Alcollarín.
40. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen on three days.
41. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on three days.
42. **Peregrine:** Two seen in Monfragüe.
43. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo.
44. **Moorhen:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
45. **Western Swamphen:** Heard at Arrocampo.
46. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
47. **Red-knobbed Coot:** One seen at Alcollarín.
48. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains near Trujillo and Campo Lugar.
49. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen near Trujillo and Alcollarín.
50. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen at Alcollarín.
51. **Ruff:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
52. **Common Redshank:** Seen at Alcollarín.
53. **Spotted Redshank:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
54. **Greenshank:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
55. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on river in the rice fields.
56. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
57. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen at Sierra Brava.
58. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
59. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
60. **Woodpigeon:** Seen almost daily.
61. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.

62. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Two seen near Sierra Brava.
63. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard on three days.
64. **Scops Owl:** Seen in Trujillo.
65. **Little Owl:** One near Campo Lugar.
66. **Alpine Swift:** Seen in Monfragüe.
67. **Pallid Swift:** Seen at Arrocampo.
68. **Kingfisher:** Seen on two days.
69. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
70. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
71. **Greater Short-toed Lark:** Seen on the plains.
72. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost every day.
73. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost every day.
74. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
75. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
76. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen on two days.
77. **House Martin:** Seen almost daily.
78. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
79. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields.
80. **Grey wagtail:** Seen on two days.
81. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
82. **Robin:** Recorded in Monfragüe.
83. **Black Redstart:** Seen on two days.
84. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
85. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen on the rice fields.
86. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen in Monfragüe.
87. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe.
88. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
89. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded on three days.
90. **Zitting Cisticola:** Recorded daily.
91. **Savi's Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo.
92. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen on the plains and in Monfragüe.
93. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen on three days.
94. **Blackcap:** Seen on two days.
95. **Chiffchaff:** Recorded almost daily.
96. **Wren:** Heard in Monfragüe.
97. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen in Monfragüe.
98. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
99. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
101. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen on three days.
102. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
103. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
104. **Jackdaw:** Seen on the plains and Arrocampo.
105. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
106. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
107. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
108. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on three days.
109. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.

110. **Chaffinch:** Seen on three days.
111. **Serin:** Seen daily.
112. **Greenfinch:** Seen on two days.
113. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
114. **Siskin:** Seen in Monfragüe
115. **Linnet:** Seen on one day.
116. **Hawfinch:** Seen in Monfragüe.
117. **Cirl Bunting:** Heard at River Tamuja.
118. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
119. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Mammals

Red Deer

Egyptian Mongoose

Rabbit

Reptiles and Amphibians

Spanish Terrapin

Butterflies

Swallowtail

Red Admiral

Clouded Yellow

Small White

Green-striped White

Bath White

Nettle-tree Butterfly

Orchids

Bug Orchid

Sawfly orchid

Mirror orchid

Champagne Orchid

Pink Butterfly Orchid