

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



LATE SPRING HOLIDAY FOR HELEN, RUTH AND FIONA

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

22nd May – 29th May 2024



Itinerary

22nd May 2024: Pick-up at Madrid

23rd May 2024: Monfragüe National Park

24th May 2024: Villuercas Mountains

25th May 2024: Madrigalejo, rice fields, Alcollarín Reservoir and Garciaz

26th May 2024: Don Benito, Almendralejo, Alange and Mérida

27th May 2024: Plains east of Cáceres, Tamuja valley, La Garganta, Hervás road.

28th May 2024: The Covatilla ski station and Candelario.

29th May 2024: La Garganta area and return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

22nd May 2024: Pick-up at Madrid

Martin met Helen, Ruth and Fiona at 18.30 at Madrid Airport and we headed off through very busy traffic on the Madrid ring road. Thankfully, it eased off considerably on the motorway for Extremadura and we arrived at 22.30 (with a stop for a meal at the halfway point) at the Casa Rural El Recuerdo to be welcomed by Claudia and heralded by **Nightingales** in the garden throughout the night.

23rd May 2024: Monfragüe National Park

We had glorious warm sunny weather, and we enjoyed the whole day at the Monfragüe National Park. We reached the park, having crossed a vast landscape of *dehesa*, to make our first stop at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint. We had a tremendous morning there with wonderful views of all **three species of vulture, Peregrine, Blue Rock Thrush** and an obliging **Rock Bunting**. The massive Peña Falcón cliff was impressive, proving nest sites for **Griffon Vultures** and **Black Storks**. We watched chicks on nest of both species being fed by incoming parents. It was a real privilege.



Barn Swallows

After an excellent refreshment stop in the village of Villareal de San Carlos, where we watched a delightful family of recently fledged **Barn Swallows** being fed, we moved onto a small viewpoint at the Puerto de Serrana. On the way a **Two-tailed Pasha** flew alongside the vehicle and at the viewpoint itself of we had our first of several sightings of the species. A **White-rumped Swift** was also present and we saw a **Bonelli's Eagle** too. **Golden Orioles** were calling but kept out of sight.

We continued through the park, stopping to watch a majestic **Red Deer** stag and had our picnic at the Portilla del Tiétar. Here there were more close views of vultures and butterflies such as **Spanish Purple Hairstreak**. Nearby in a dehesa of Cork Oak, butterflies were out in numbers, including several **Lang's Short-tailed Blues**. We also saw a **Western Orphean Warbler**.



Red Deer

On our way back through the park we took a short walk beside the River Tagus, where massive numbers of **House Martins** were present, where there **Bosca's Newt** in some drinking troughs and we had yet another view of **Two-tailed Pasha**, as well as several **Nettle-tree Butterflies**. It was then onwards to Trujillo for some shopping before return to relax and celebrate Ruth's birthday at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.



Two-tailed Pasha

24th May 2024: Villuercas Mountains

It was a warm and sunny day, and yet again with very little wind. We drove south-east, passing through Cañamero, making a short detour to visit the Ruiz Torres winery, and then ascending to the peak of the Villuercas Mountains. Here from the height of 1600 metres we could look across the impressive Appalachian relief, the finest in Europe and the reason for which the area has been declared as a UNESCO Geopark. Despite the height, butterflies were present: several **Common Swallowtails** and very attractive **Queen of Spain Fritillaries**.



Queen of Spain Fritillary on Dwarf Sheep's Bit

Birds included a singing **Common Rock Thrush**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting**. We descended into the Ibor valley and took a wonderful drive up through cork oak and then Pyrenean oak woodland. On the way we had an exceptionally good view of a perched **Honey Buzzard**. We stopped in a valley full of Pyrenean Oak where **Western Bonelli's Warblers** were singing. A **Great Spotted Woodpecker** played percussion throughout our picnic. We had a very pleased a walk through the dappled shade of the trees, hearing an **Iberian Chiffchaff** and **Nuthatches** amongst others.

We then worked our way downstream along the Ibor valley, stopping near Castañar de Ibor for a walk beside Sweet Chestnut trees, where **Golden Orioles** were singing and briefly seen.

On our return to Trujillo we stopped at the Bull Ring to watch several **Lesser Kestrels** gliding over the small colony there.



Honey Buzzard

25th May 2024: Madrigalejo, rice fields, Alcollarín Reservoir and Garciaz

It was an even warmer day today, with sunshine throughout and a light wind in the afternoon. We headed south, towards the town of Madrigalejo. We made the first stop near a small old gravel pit where there was a fine **Purple Heron** and a **Savi's Warbler** was singing. Nearby we had lovely views of a gorgeous of a **Black-winged Kite**, both at rest and in flight and briefly a second bird too. **Bee-eaters** were present as was an **Iberian Grey Shrike**. Onward through the rice fields, some of which were being flooded in preparation for the rice crop. A group of **Common Ringed Plovers** were found, as well as **Black-winged Stilts** and a **Spoonbill**. Best of all were some delightful **Collared Pratincoles** which put on an excellent show for us.



At the River Ruercas (The Bridge of Ruth), **Common Waxbills** were very obliging, **but Golden Orioles** offered just brief flight views. A male Little Bittern was good compensation however and we also saw a **Common Cuckoo**.

After coffee, which gave us a further chance to watch **Lesser Kestrels**, this time at the silo building across the road, we went on to the Alcollarín Reservoir. At the entrance, we enjoyed the **Bee-eater** colony, getting wonderfully close views of these multi-coloured birds. At the picnic site, we watched **Great Crested** and **Little Grebes**, as well as **Great Egrets, Cattle Egrets, Little Egrets** and a busy group of **Spoonbills**. A **Great Reed Warbler** showed itself reasonably well, and sang throughout our sojourn there. A **Western Orphean Warbler** also sang at the picnic site. We continued along the eastern shore of the lake, seeing several **Woodchat Shrikes, Thekla Larks** and a **Booted Eagle**. Moving then to the western shore, we found a pair of **Little Tern**, and some more **Collared Pratincoles**.



Little Tern

We completed the day on a small diversion to woodland near Garciaz. Here we saw a **Short-toed Eagle**, but what was very special was the beauty of the flower meadows.

26th May 2024: Don Benito, Almendralejo, Alange and Mérida

A hot and sunny day and we headed south, to a very different landscape to that of yesterday. We stopped first at a reed-fringed gravel pit beside the River Guadiana near Don Benito. In the gallery woodland of eucalyptus, poplar and willow we heard **Golden Orioles** calling from all directions and even had several glimpses of birds in flight and in a mulberry tree. Two **Western Olivaceous Warblers** were heard, and one seen quite well. We also saw **Little Bittern, Purple Heron, Purple Swamphen** and **Kingfisher**. It was a very rewarding morning.

We then drove south of Mérida, to the vast landscape near Almendralejo, dominated by olives and vines. Here we searched for a singing Rufous Bush Robin. At the first area we tried, there was no joy. We tried a second area nearby and a bird flew from an olive and settled on a trellis,

starting to sing. It was a **Rufous Bush Robin**. We had a prolonged and excellent view of this much-sought-after species. A pair of **Montagu's Harriers** was also a thrill to watch.



Rufous Bush Robin

Elated, we stopped for refreshments nearby and then we proceeded to the Alange reservoir. Our plan to take a track to the edge of the water was thwarted by a burst tyre. Once replaced, we then moved to the car park near the dam of the reservoir for our picnic. From there we took a walk beside the rocky outcrops and olive groves on the northern shore of the lake. It was a hot period of the day but we were rewarded with excellent views of at least three **Black Wheatears**.

From there we went to Mérida for an afternoon walk on the Roman Bridge. Flocks of **Glossy Ibis** flew overhead and we had good views of **Western Swamphen** and **Little Bittern**, but perhaps the presence of the swifts, three species, nesting under the bridge was the most memorable experience, feeling surrounded by these amazing birds and being able to see them all well from different perspectives at close range.

27th May 2024: Plains east of Cáceres, Tamuja valley, La Garganta, Hervás road.

The hot weather continued, although by late afternoon in the mountains there was a refreshing breeze. We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and headed west toward the provincial capital Cáceres. Here on the open plains, now blond with ripened grasses, we had lovely views of **Little Owl**, **Roller** and **Lesser Kestrel** on nest boxes attached to a line of telegraph poles beside the road. **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were also using the cables as vantage perches.

Beyond the plains, the River Tajuja cut a deep valley and from a viewpoint we could admire the view of the more wooded terrain. We saw a distant pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** soaring over the hillside and numerous **Griffon Vultures** were present as well.

Following coffee in the delightful little village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we started our journey northwards. At the edge of Plasencia we stopped for a shopping expedition at the store of Chinata, purveying a wide range of smoked paprika and olive oil products. Onward we drove, passing through La Garganta (Extremadura's second highest town) to a picnic area beside an old wolf trap. From there we could admire the magnificent massif of the Sierra de Bejar, with patches of snow still glistening in the afternoon sunshine. After our picnic, we drove a little bit further, stopping for a very enjoyable walk beside mountain meadows and patches of pines. A fine **Red-backed Shrike** was seen, as well as a **Honey Buzzard**. **Western Bonelli's Warblers**, **Common Chiffchaff** and **Common Whitethroat** were in song. Butterflies offered a serious distraction, with **Knapweed Fritillary**, **Marsh Fritillary** and **Lesser Spotted Fritillary** all present.



Violet Limodore

We explored the Sweet Chestnut woodland south of Hervás and found several specimens of **Violet Limodore**, a very interesting parasitic orchid. A cold beer was then in order and from the terrace we could watch a very engaging **Black Redstart**.

We completed the day back on the high elevation above La Garganta, at dusk to hear **European Nightjars** calling from several directions. The evening sky as we returned to the hotel was amazing.

28th May 2024: The Covatilla ski station and Candelario.

We spent the day just across the border from Extremadura, in the province of Salamanca. We started at the high-altitude car park for the Covatilla ski station, at an elevation of 1950 metres. We were surrounded by a deep carpet of broom, coming into flower and filling the air with scent.



There were banks of snow beside the ski slopes. **Skylarks** were singing above us. Almost immediately we found a fine male **Bluethroat**, giving short bursts of song from bushes at the edge of the car park. A little later a second bird was seen. A **Honey Buzzard** drifted overhead and **Northern Wheatear** performed song flights. A **Common Rock Thrush** did likewise, coming to settle on a nearby antenna. **Dunnocks** were numerous (the Spanish subspecies) and there were several **Tawny Pipits** too.



Tawny Pipit

The views across the Gredos Mountains to the east were stunning, almost making us overlook a beautiful and endangered **Cyren's Rock Lizard**.



Cyren's Rock Lizard

We made a slow descent, making several stops, and as we did we came across more butterflies, including **Niobe Fritillary** and **Sooty Copper**.

We visited the beautiful historic town of Candelario and entered a traditional little bar for a beer and a bite to eat. It was then up again to the mountainside above the Plataforma, where we had several views of singing **Ortolan Buntings**. **Marsh Orchids** were in flower. Moving to lower elevations, we entered woodland: first pine and then Pyrenean oak. Here a stream gushed over granite boulders, a **Viperine Snake** was seen. On the lichen-covered oaks, **Large Tortoiseshells** sunned themselves. A **Pied Flycatcher** was singing too.



Lesser Spotted Fritillary

We had an enjoyable evening on the terrace of the hotel, refreshed by the beer and a very satisfying *plato combinado*!

29th May 2024: La Garganta area and return to Madrid

We checked out of the hotel and returned to the mountain meadows above La Garganta. There was no breeze and the clear sky and sunshine made it a very pleasant warm morning. We walked through a belt of pines onto more open ground, affording lovely views back onto the Sierra de Bejar. **Crested Tits** and **Coal Tits** were at the edge of the pines and **Woodchat** and **Red-backed Shrikes** in the area too, both obliging us with superb views. The meadows were a delight to soak in, giving the promise of still more colour and variety of flowers in the days ahead.

We made a short descent to oak woodland and watched a **Southern White Admiral** patrolling its territory whilst a **Song Thrush** and **Firecrest** sang.

It was then time to move on, and we returned in the direction of Madrid, making a stop for an excellent Menu del Dia about halfway in the journey. As planned, we reached the airport at about 17.00, with ample time for check-in.



Knapweed Fritillary

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

BIRDS

1. **Mute Swan:** One at Trujillo.
2. **Grey Lag Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
3. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange Reservoirs.
4. **Gadwall:** Seen at Alcollarín.
5. **Mallard:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange Reservoirs.
6. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on three days.
7. **Quail:** Heard at Alange and above Candelario.
8. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
9. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
10. **Great Cormorant:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange Reservoirs.
11. **Little Bittern:** Seen at River Ruercas, Don Benito and Mérida.
12. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Heard at Don Benito.
13. **Cattle Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín, Alange, Mérida and on return to Madrid.

14. **Little Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín, Alange and Mérida
15. **Great Egret:** Seen on three days.
16. **Grey Heron:** Seen on three days.
17. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Alcollarín, Don Benito, Alange and Mérida.
18. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe.
19. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
20. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Mérida.
21. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Alcollarín.
22. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen in Monfragüe
23. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
24. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
25. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen on two days.
26. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
27. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Seen in Monfragüe and at River Tamuja.
28. **Black Kite:** Seen almost daily.
29. **Red Kite:** Seen on three days.
30. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on two days.
31. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen near Almendralejo and on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
32. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
33. **Honey Buzzard:** Seen in Ibor valley and in the Sierra de Bejar.
34. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen at Baños de Montemayor.
35. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen near Madrigalejo.
36. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen on five days.
37. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on two days.
38. **Peregrine:** Seen at Monfragüe.
39. **Moorhen:** Seen at Alcollarín and Don Benito.
40. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Don Benito and Mérida.
41. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir and Mérida.
42. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir and the rice fields.
43. **Stone Curlew:** Seen on way to the Villuercas Mountains.
44. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen on rice fields, at Alcollarín and Alange.
45. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
46. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir, the rice fields and Alange.
47. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange.
48. **Little Tern:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange.
49. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Alange.
50. **Yellow-legged Gull:** Seen at Alange Reservoir.
51. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen flying over the rice fields.
52. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
53. **Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
54. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
55. **Turtle Dove:** Heard at River Tamuja.
56. **Common Cuckoo:** Recorded most days.
57. **Monk Parakeets:** Seen in Madrid
58. **Scops Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente.
59. **Tawny Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente.
60. **Little Owl:** Seen at Campo Lugar and near Cáceres.

61. **European Nightjar:** Seen and heard at La Garganta.
62. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange, Mérida and Monfragüe.
63. **Common Swift:** Seen every day.
64. **Pallid Swift:** Seen on three days.
65. **White-rumped Swift:** Seen in Monfragüe.
66. **Kingfisher:** Seen on two days.
67. **Bee-eater:** Seen almost every day.
68. **Roller:** Seen east of Cáceres.
69. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
70. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Recorded on two days.
71. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
72. **Greater Short-toed Lark:** Singing on the rice fields.
73. **Crested Lark:** Seen on three days.
74. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on two days.
75. **Woodlark:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente and seen in the mountains.
76. **Skylark:** Seen in Sierra de Bejar.
77. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Alcollarín.
78. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
79. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
80. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen almost daily.
81. **House Martin:** Seen almost daily.
82. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields and Sierra de Bejar.
83. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on three days.
84. **White Wagtail:** Seen on four days.
85. **Tawny Pipit:** Seen on Sierra de Bejar.
86. **Wren:** Recorded on five days.
87. **Dunnock:** Seen in the mountains.
88. **Robin:** Recorded on four days.
89. **Nightingale:** Seen or heard daily.
90. **Bluethroat:** Seen in Sierra de Bejar.
91. **Rufous Bush Robin:** Seen near Almendralejo.
92. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
93. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
94. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Alange.
95. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen in Sierra de Bejar.
96. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe, Villuercas Mountains and Alange.
97. **Common Rock Thrush:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains and Sierra de Bejar.
98. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
99. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen at La Garganta.
100. **Song Thrush:** Singing near La Garganta.
101. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen or heard on twodays.
102. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen or heard on five days.
103. **Savi's Warbler:** Heard at Madrigalejo.
104. **Reed Warbler:** Seen or heard on two days.
105. **Great Reed Warbler:** Seen or heard at Alcollarín and Don Benito.
106. **Melodious Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
107. **Western Olivaceous Warbler:** Heard and seen at Don Benito.
108. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.

109. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains and Sierra de Bejar.
110. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
111. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Seen in Monfragüe and Alcollarín.
112. **Common Whitethroat:** Seen in the mountains.
113. **Blackcap:** Seen or heard daily.
114. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** Seen in Ibores and Sierra de Bejar.
115. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** Singing in the Ibores and near Candelario.
116. **Common Chiffchaff:** Singing near La Garganta.
117. **Firecrest:** Singing in Sierra de Bejar.
118. **Pied Flycatcher:** Singing near Candelario.
119. **Long-tailed Tit:** Recorded on two days.
120. **Crested Tit:** Seen at La Garganta.
121. **Coal Tit:** Seen at La Garganta.
122. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
123. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
124. **Nuthatch:** Heard on two days.
125. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen or heard on four days.
126. **Penduline Tit:** Heard at Don Benito.
127. **Golden Oriole:** Heard or seen daily.
128. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen on two days.
129. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
130. **Red-backed Shrike:** Seen at La Garganta.
131. **Jay:** Seen on five days.
132. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen almost daily.
133. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
134. **Jackdaw:** Seen on three days.
135. **Carrion Crow:** Seen at La Garganta.
136. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
137. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
138. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
139. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on two days.
140. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
141. **Rock Sparrow:** Heard in Monfragüe.
142. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields and at Don Benito.
143. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
144. **Serin:** Seen daily.
145. **Greenfinch:** Seen almost daily.
146. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
147. **Linnet:** Seen almost daily.
148. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Monfragüe and Alcollarín.
149. **Cirl Bunting:** Heard on two days.
150. **Rock Bunting:** Seen on three days.
151. **Ortolan Bunting:** Seen in Sierra de Bejar.
152. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

Butterflies

1. Spanish Festoon
2. Common Swallowtail
3. Scarce Swallowtail
4. Black-veined White
5. Large White
6. Small White
7. Orange Tip
8. Provence Orange Tip
9. Bath White
10. Clouded Yellow
11. Brimstone
12. Cleopatra
13. False Ilex Hairstreak
14. Spanish Purple Hairstreak
15. Green Hairstreak
16. Small Copper
17. Sooty Copper
18. Lang's Short-tailed Blue
19. Holly Blue
20. Green-underside Blue
21. Black-eyed Blue
22. Brown Argus
23. Common Blue
24. Nettle-tree Butterfly
25. Two-tailed Pasha
26. Southern White Admiral
27. Large Tortoiseshell
28. Red Admiral
29. Painted Lady
30. Small Tortoiseshell
31. Cardinal
32. Niobe Fritillary
33. Queen of Spain Fritillary
34. Lesser Spotted Fritillary
35. Glanville Fritillary
36. Knapweed Fritillary
37. Marsh Fritillary
38. Meadow Brown
39. Small Heath
40. Speckled Wood
41. Wall Brown
42. Mallow Skipper

Reptiles and amphibians

Viperine Snake

Ladder Snake

Large Psammmodromus
Guadarrama Wall Lizard
Geniez's Wall Lizard
Cyren's Rock Lizard
Spanish Terrapin
Red-eared Terrapin
Moorish Gecko
Iberian Water Frog
Common Tree Frog
Bosca's Newt

Mammals

Red Deer
Roe Deer

Odonata

1. **Beautiful Demoiselle**
2. **Blue Emperor**
3. **Lesser Emperor**
4. **Broad-bodied Chaser**
5. **Broad Scarlet**
6. **Common Darter**