

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



EARLY SPRING HOLIDAY FOR DAVID AND MARY

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

28th February – 6th March 2024



Watching the Blue-winged Teal and Garganey at Alcollarín

Itinerary

28th February 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport

29th February 2024: Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir

1st March 2024: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres

2nd March 2024: Madrigalejo and the rice fields

3rd March 2024: Monfragüe National Park

4th March 2024: Malpartida de Cáceres, Cáceres, Belén and Trujillo

5th March 2024: Villuercas Mountains and Alcollarín Reservoir

6th March 2024: Return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

28th February 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport

Martin met David and Mary at about 16.00 at Madrid airport and we set off under clear blue skies around the southern ring-road and then onto the motorway to Extremadura. We completed the journey in under three-hours. On the journey we saw **White Storks**, **several Red Kites** and as we neared base, some roosting **Griffon Vultures** sitting on pylons. Claudia was ready to welcome us with a tasty dinner.

29th February 2024: Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir

The day started clear and calm, but as it progressed the wind became fresher (from the north-west) and there was some scattered cloud. David and Mary had a short walk along the lane after breakfast before we set off southwards to the plains near Campo Lugar. At our very first spot we found a small group of **Great Bustards**, with one of the males in display. We were surrounded by the song of **Calandra Larks** and **Corn Buntings**. Across the plains we made several stops, seeing male **Lesser Kestrels**, a **Northern Wheatear**, a **Black Kite** and larks galore!

Following coffee at Campo Lugar, we spent the rest of the day at the nearby Alcollarín Reservoir. It was rather choppy so the multitude of duck present were not easy to study. However, close to where we had our picnic, we found a couple of male **Garganey** amongst the Teal and then, to our surprise and delight, a male **Blue-winged Teal**!



Blue-winged Teal and Garganey

This was only the second ever record in Extremadura of this North American species (the first was ten years previously). Although distant we did have several prolonged views of the bird. Along the reservoir we also saw numerous other duck, especially **Shoveler** and **Pintail**, and a fine **Black-necked Grebe**. We also had the privilege of watching for several minutes a **Bonelli's Eagle**, which was then mobbed by a **Marsh Harrier**.



Bonelli's Eagle

In sheltered patches a few **Vagrant Emperor** dragonflies were hunting. Amongst the flowers, there were some fine banks of **Hoop-Petticoat Narcissus**, **Barbary Nut Iris** and **Sand Crocuses**.



Alcollarín Reservoir

1st March 2024: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres



Trujillo from the plains to the west

Sunshine and a fresh wind summed up the weather today, so it felt quite chilly during our stops in the morning. We headed west from Trujillo, entering the vast plains, looking stunning with the yellow mantle of **Wall Rocket** in flower. At our first stop we saw a small group of **Little Bustards**, including two males already in breeding plumage. A large flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** also erupted from the same field, whilst **Calandra Larks** sang from all sides. A group of eight **Great Bustard** males included two which were in full display. Taking a small dirt track, we stood, surrounded by the plains, finding another group of **Little Bustards** and watching a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle**.

We then drove west, entering the plains again south-west of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. Taking the opportunity to shelter in a hide, we watched **Pin-tailed** and **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. A group of **Great Bustards** was also seen from the road, almost hidden in the tall flowers growing in the field.

Following an excellent cup of coffee in the village, we stopped overlooking the River Tamuja. It was quiet to start with but soon livened-up, so we decided to have our picnic there. We had excellent views of **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and **Red Kite**, a flock of migrating **Common Cranes**, but pride of place must go to the pair of **Otters** that we watched enchanted for at least 45 minutes.

Following that lovely sojourn, we made a shorter stop beside the River Magasca north of the village before returning to the plains. We stopped at a drovers' trail where there were dozens of **Griffon Vultures**, and some kites, including **Black Kite**, clearly attracted to a carcass, but which was out of view. The trail itself was excellent for plants including **Sawfly Orchid** and the delightful **Least Adder's Tongue** fern.

We made another botanical stop at the edge of the granite *berrocal*, in a landscape where the flowers were staggering, especially luxuriant **Hoop Petticoat Narcissus** and **Star of Bethlehem**.



Watching Otters

2nd March 2024: Madrigalejo and the rice fields

As forecast, the day turned out very windy and cloudy. It was generally dry until mid-afternoon when it started to rain heavily. The fresh wind made it feel a lot chillier than on previous days.

We ventured first south towards the town of Madrigalejo, where in an area of fruit orchards and rough pasture we saw a **Black-winged Kite** in flight. An **Iberian Grey Shrike** gave us an excellent view and we saw several pairs of **White Storks** nesting in the holm oak trees.

From there we continued south to the area near the village of Vegas Altas. This rice-growers' village was surrounded by rice fields, mainly as stubble at this time of year, although some had been ploughed. The windy conditions made it difficult to find small birds, and a flock of **Red Avadavats** resolutely stayed in shelter. There were very few large birds, so following an excellent coffee in the village, we decided to move elsewhere. However a **Peregrine** attempting to take a **Cattle Egret** was an interesting sight.

We had more success on the rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín. Here there were large numbers of waders, including **Dunlin**, **Little Stint**, **Ringed Plover** and **Kentish Plover**. They were together with a host of wagtails and pipits, including some very smart **Yellow Wagtails** and a few Water **Pipits**.

A party of **Common Crane** flying over were the only ones we saw.

We had our picnic sheltering in the car and then headed west to explore the rice fields near Santa Amalia. As we approached we had a view of a fine male **Hen Harrier**. Here the main focus was a huge number of **Black-headed Gulls**. All facing the wind, they shuffled forward, then leap-frogging backwards to start again at the leeward side of the field. In this group of perhaps a thousand birds we found two **Mediterranean Gulls** and some **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**.

Back across country, we reached base just before 17.00 and just before a very heavy bout of rain.

3rd March 2024: Monfragüe National Park

There was a fresh north-westerly wind throughout the day, but it largely remained sunny, with just a shower of rain mid-afternoon.

We headed north-west from Trujillo, taking the motorway as far as Almaráz, before heading west to Serrejón and then to the northern side of the Monfragüe National Park, entering at the Portilla del Tiétar. We had an excellent hour or so at this lovely viewpoint, seeing all three vulture species, as well as three separate **Spanish Imperial Eagles** and a **Black Stork**. A **Rock Bunting** was singing nearby and David found a **Blue Rock Thrush** and a **Kingfisher**. The banks were covered by **Angel's Tears Narcissus** and we saw a delightful **Brown Harebell** and **Yellow Star of Bethlehem** in flower.



Juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle

Following a good cup of coffee at the edge of a cork oak grove, we made our way through the park, making a series of stops at marked viewpoints. We had good views of two different **Bonelli's Eagles**, a **Short-toed Eagle**, as well as two **Red Deer** stags. The windy conditions did not make it easy to find small birds, but we did find a few woodland species such as **Hawfinch** and **Song Thrush**. At some drinking pools, we found a **Bosca's Newt**.

We completed our day at the magnificent Salto de Gitano viewpoint. Dozens of vultures were in the sky above us. **Black Redstarts** and **Blue Rock Thrushes** perched and sang from rocks below. We also had a superb view of a pair of **Peregrines**, one plucking a pigeon on a ledge of the Peña Falcon cliff in front of us.

On our way back home, we stopped beside the River Almonte where we had a great view of a low-flying **Short-toed Eagle**.

4th March 2024: Malpartida de Cáceres, Cáceres, Belén and Trujillo

The rather windy conditions continued, with cloudy weather, but just a short shower in the middle part of the day, and by late afternoon, the sun was shining.

We drove westwards, passing the outskirts of Cáceres and onward to Malpartida de Cáceres where we stopped at the edge of the Barruecos National Monument. Here we had a very enjoyable sojourn beside a pool with storks' nests on poles. The pool was full of an interesting selection of birds including **Jack Snipe, Common Snipe, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Spoonbill** and several species of duck. The **Cetti's Warblers** were especially obliging. Nearby we watched a busy little flock of **Common Waxbills**. We stood beside the 18th century dam and across the expanse of water were **White Storks** nesting on the top of smooth granite outcrops.



Cetti's Warbler

After a coffee stop in the small town, we continued back to Cáceres and stopped for a wander through part of the Parque del Principe. Although the light was rather dull, we saw a wonderful array of species including **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Hawfinch, Iberian Magpies** and some delightful **Siskins**. A singing **Short-toed Treecreeper** was a real treat.

Back towards Trujillo, we stopped at the edge of the plains just shy of the town and had a picnic in the shelter of the car. Then we drove to the edge of Belén village where we had prolonged and interesting views of three **Great Spotted Cuckoos**, being chased by **Common Magpies** and also pursuing themselves.

We completed the afternoon on a walk through the old part of the town, ascending to the fortress and exploring the narrow medieval streets. At the edge of the town we watched **Lesser Kestrels** coming to their nest holes in an old silo building.

5th March 2024: Villuercas Mountains and Alcollarín Reservoir

After the stormy weather of previous days, we were rewarded with clear skies and just a light wind. It remained fine weather throughout the day. It was perfect weather to explore the Villuercas Mountain range to the east. We started with a stop at the dam of the small reservoir near Cañamero, where **Crag Martins** hawked insects above our heads. Downstream of the dam, we enjoyed a very pleasant walk beside the Ruercas River. There were flocks of **Siskins** delightfully feeding on the alder cones. A **Dipper** appeared on a couple of occasions. We found some **Jonquil Narcissus** in flower. Climbing from there we reached the town of Guadalupe where we had coffee. Passing the grand monastery and basilica, we ascended above the town and started on the small road towards the peak of the mountain. We made a couple of stops on the way, seeing a **Large Tortoiseshell** butterfly and visiting a medieval snow well (ice house), before reaching the summit. There we were granted magnificent views, north to the snow-capped Gredos Mountains, eastwards over the series of ridges forming the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark, south over the rice fields and beyond, and west across more hills, and the plains of Trujillo.

As befitting this grand location, a pair of **Golden Eagles** flew across our view.



Our picnic site with a view

We descended past dramatic scree slopes into the Almonte Valley, taking a picnic at a very beautiful spot looking towards the gorge that the river cuts for itself as it leaves the mountains westwards. There were several butterflies, including **Western Dappled White**, and overhead soaring **Egyptian Vultures** and **Black Storks**.

We then moved westwards too, crossing the Almonte River on our way to Aldeacentenera and Garciaz. Past the latter village, we walked on an old drovers' trail, seeing **Woodlark** and a **Mistle Thrush**.

We completed the afternoon returning to the place where we had spent the afternoon on the first day: the Alcollarín Reservoir. Here we enjoyed watching the wintering duck in glorious afternoon sunshine. There were also some waders such as **Black-tailed Godwit** and **Ruff** present. A fine **Short-toed Eagle** glided overhead and **White Storks** and **Great Egrets** stood at the water's edge amongst the bank of yellow flowers. A fitting memory of the holiday.

6th March 2024: Return to Madrid

We set off on the dot at 06.00. A **Scops Owl** and a **Barn Owl** had been calling. The run up to Madrid was smooth and uneventful, although our planned stop for a snack did not materialise because the cafeteria was still closed, so we had to wait until the outskirts of Madrid to stretch our legs and have a bite to eat. A **Merlin**, **Red Kite** and **White Storks** were seen on the journey.

As expected for that time of the morning, the ring road was very busy, but we arrived at the airport at 09.30 with plenty of time, with hardly any queue at the very efficient check-in desk.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

We did not attempt to chase as many species as possible, but instead to have a relaxing holiday and to include some new places and landscapes for Mary and David to enjoy.

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on four days.
2. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir, Malpartida de Cáceres and on the plains.
4. **Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.
5. **Mallard**: Seen every day.
6. **Pintail**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir in large numbers.
7. **Garganey**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
8. **Blue-winged Teal**: A drake found at Alcollarín Reservoir on 29th February.
9. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.
10. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir and on the rice fields.
11. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on three days.
12. **Little Grebe**: Seen on four days
13. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.
14. **Black-necked Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
15. **Great Cormorant**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir and Monfragüe.
16. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on the rice fields.
17. **Little Egret**: Seen on four days.
18. **Great Egret**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir and on the rice fields.
19. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
20. **Black Stork**: Seen in Monfragüe and the Villuercas Mountains.
21. **White Stork**: Seen every day.
22. **Glossy Ibis**: Seen on rice fields.
23. **Spoonbill**: Seen at Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.
24. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen in Monfragüe and the Villuercas Mountains.

25. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
26. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
27. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen in Monfragüe, River Almonte and Alcollarín.
28. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on the plains and in Monfragüe.
29. **Golden Eagle:** A pair seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
30. **Bonelli's Eagle:** One seen at Alcollarín and two seen in Monfragüe.
31. **Black Kite:** Seen almost daily.
32. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
33. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
34. **Hen Harrier:** Seen near Santa Amalia.
35. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost daily.
36. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen near Madrigalejo.
37. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen most days.
38. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on one day.
39. **Merlin:** Seen on return to Madrid.
40. **Peregrine:** One seen near Vegas Altas and two in Monfragüe.
41. **Moorhen:** Seen at Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.
42. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir and Trujillo.
43. **Common Crane:** Seen migrating over the plains and on the rice fields.
44. **Little Bustard:** Seen on the plains near Trujillo.
45. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains, near Trujillo east of Cáceres and Campo Lugar plains.
46. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres and near Zorita.
47. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
48. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
49. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
50. **Golden Plover:** Seen on the plains.
51. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen almost daily.
52. **Dunlin:** Seen on the rice fields.
53. **Little Stint:** Seen on the rice fields.
54. **Ruff:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres and Alcollarín Reservoir.
55. **Jack Snipe:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres.
56. **Common Snipe:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres and rice fields.
57. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir and Santa Amalia.
58. **Greenshank:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
59. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on three days.
60. **Wood Sandpiper:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres.
61. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres and Alcollarín.
62. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen most days.
63. **Mediterranean Gull:** Seen at Santa Amalia.
64. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on two days.
65. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
66. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
67. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
68. **Woodpigeon:** Seen almost daily.
69. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
70. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen at Belén.
71. **Monk Parakeet:** Seen in Cáceres.

72. **Barn Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente before dawn on 6th March.
73. **Scops Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente before dawn on 6th March.
74. **Little Owl:** Seen near Campo Lugar.
75. **Kingfisher:** Seen on two days.
76. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
77. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Recorded in Cáceres and Monfragüe.
78. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen in Cáceres.
79. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
80. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost every day.
81. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on three days.
82. **Woodlark:** Seen near Garciaz.
83. **Skylark:** Seen on the plains.
84. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
85. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
86. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen on one day.
87. **House Martin:** Seen almost daily.
88. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
89. **Water Pipit:** Seen on the rice fields.
90. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields.
91. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on the River Tamuja.
92. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
93. **Dipper:** Seen near Cañamero.
94. **Wren:** Heard on several days.
95. **Duncock:** Heard in the Villuercas Mountains.
96. **Robin:** Recorded most days.
97. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost every day.
98. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
99. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen on Campo Lugar plains.
100. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe.
101. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
102. **Song Thrush:** Seen almost every day.
103. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
104. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres.
105. **Zitting Cisticola:** Recorded on two days.
106. **Dartford Warbler:** Heard on two days.
107. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Blackcap:** Seen almost daily.
109. **Chiffchaff:** Seen almost daily.
110. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
111. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
112. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
113. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded on two days.
114. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
115. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
116. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
117. **Jackdaw:** Seen on three days.
118. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
119. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.

120. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
121. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
122. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
123. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields.
124. **Common Waxbill:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres.
125. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
126. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
127. **Greenfinch:** Seen on four days.
128. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
129. **Siskin:** Seen in Cáceres.
130. **Linnet:** Seen almost daily.
131. **Hawfinch:** Seen on three days.
132. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
133. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

Mammals

Red Deer

Egyptian Mongoose

Otter

Butterflies

Western Dappled White

Small White

Clouded Yellow

Large Tortoiseshell

Wall Brown

Red Admiral

Dragonflies

Vagrant Emperor

Reptiles and Amphibians

Stripeless Tree Frog

Spanish Water Frog

Spanish Terrapin

Bosca's Newt

Some plants

Angel's Tears Narcissus

Hoop Petticoat Narcissus

Common Jonquil Narcissus

Yellow Star of Bethlehem

Star of Bethlehem

Brown Harebell

Spanish Bluebell

Sand Crocus

Narrow-leaved Lupin

Jersey Buttercup

Amethyst Toadflax

Meadow Saxifrage

Purple Sand Spurrey

Strapwort

Mediterranean Catchfly

Common Storksbill

Mediterranean Storksbill

Wall Rocket

Tall Rocket

Wild radish

French Lavander

Spotted Rockrose

Gum Cistus

Spanish Heath

Tree Heath

White Broom

Sawfly Orchid

Least Adder's Tongue Fern