

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SPRING HOLIDAY FOR MARTIN, LAURITS AND THOMAS

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

30th March – 5th April 2024



Itinerary

30th March 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport and Arrocampo Reservoir

31st March 2024: Plains of Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo, Sierra Brava, Alcollarín Reservoir

1st April 2024: Plains of Santa Marta de Magasca, Malpartida de Cáceres, Tamuja River, Trujillo

2nd April 2024: Alange, Mérida, Rice fields, Campo Lugar

3rd April 2024: Jaraicejo, Villuercas Mountains, Belén Plains

4th April 2024: Monfragüe and River Almonte.

5th April 2024: El Sierro at Almaráz and return to Madrid.

TRIP REPORT

30th March 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport and Arrocampo Reservoir

Martin met with Martin, Laurits and Thomas at Terminal 1 of Madrid airport just before 11.00. The traffic was extremely light on the ring-road and then all the way to Extremadura, with the busy flow heading the opposite direction, back to Madrid for those finishing their Easter holiday. The inclement weather may have been a factor for some people returning early, the sky was quite dramatic with storm clouds and signs of recent rain. On the way we saw **Red** and **Black Kites**, **Marsh Harrier** and **White Storks**. We reached a suitable lunch stop at 13.00 and from there it was only a few minutes to our birding destination for the afternoon, seeing a **Short-toed Eagle** on our way.

At the Arrocampo Reservoir, we heard straightaway a **Savi's Warbler** singing (one of several during the afternoon) and also **Zitting Cisticola** and **Cetti's Warbler**. Perhaps a dozen very colourful **Purple Herons** were starting nestbuilding activity. We had some good views of **Purple Swamphen** too. **Cattle Egrets** and **Great Egrets** were both in breeding plumage attire too. Dodging rain showers, we had good views of a **Red-legged Partridge** and at our final stop a very obliging **Savi's Warbler**, a **Squacco Heron** in flight and both a pale and a dark phase **Booted Eagle**.

We then moved on to reach Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 18.00 to be welcomed by Claudia and to enjoy a tasty meal shortly afterwards.

31st March 2024: Plains of Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo, Sierra Brava, Alcollarín Reservoir

There had been heavy rain during the night and the day dawned with mist and light rain. As we headed south, we dropped clear of the mist and enjoyed a morning which although mainly overcast, stayed day. The fresh westerly wind though made it feel very chilly. As soon as we had stopped on the Campo Lugar plains we were treated to the sight of displaying **Great Bustards**. As we stood parties of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** passed, one of them including a **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** too. From the same spot we also watched two **Stone Curlew** and a female **Montagu's Harrier**. What a magnificent start to the day, and we must also mention the wall of sound from the **Calandra Larks** too. We then drove south to Madrigalejo and took a road into *dehesa* habitat and rough pasture. Here we watched a pair of **Black-winged Kites**, perched, in flight and even mating. It was a real privilege. **Hoopoes** were also present and hidden **Little Owls** were calling.

After coffee, we stop at the edge of the rice fields and found a party of about thirty **Collared Pratincoles**, along with **Spoonbill**, egrets, **Black-winged Stilts** and **Marsh Harriers**. We then made a short visit to the area near the Sierra Brava dam, watching **Crag Martins** at the dam itself.

Crossing the Campo Lugar plains again, we made several stops, one of them yielding a male **Little Bustard** which was calling. A party of **Lesser Kestrels** were hunting nearby.

We had lunch at the picnic area of Alcollarín Reservoir, remarkably being the only people there despite it being Easter Sunday. A **Booted Eagle** and **Short-toed Eagle** was seen there, as well as a mixed group of swifts. We spent the rest of the day at the reservoir, finding the western shore especially productive. Here we refound a **Red-knobbed Coot** and enjoyed waders such

as **Ruff** (two males in breeding plumage), **Spotted Redshank**, **Greenshank** and **Lapwing**, some fine **Black-necked Grebes** and a variety of ducks. We made a final stop below the dam where we had a superbly close view of a pale-phase **Booted Eagle**.



1st April 2024: Plains of Santa Marta de Magasca, Malpartida de Cáceres, Tamuja River, Trujillo

It was overcast first thing, but generally during the day we had sunny periods, the occasional heavy shower and a fresh westerly wind throughout. We stopped first on the plains just west of Trujillo. Here we watched displaying **Great Bustards**, saw some **Little Bustards** and heard a **Quail**. A fine female **Montagu's Harrier** gave us a close and prolonged view.



We then drove west, beyond the provincial capital of Cáceres, to the outskirts of Malpartida de Cáceres where we checked a small pool, hoping to find a late Jack Snipe. The water level had risen since the recent rains, meaning very little feeding area for waders. Two **Ruff** and **Green Sandpiper** were present, amongst some roosting **Spoonbill** and a small selection of water birds. After coffee in the town we returned to the plains, seeing a male **Montagu's Harrier** and then stopping for our picnic at the very pretty Tamuja River valley. This was a superb spot.



We had excellent views of **Short-toed Eagle** and **Booted Eagle**. But best of all was a displaying **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. It disappeared just before a heavy rain storm, but as soon as the sky cleared the bird reappeared and gave us a very good view, in perfect light.

We then moved back onto the plains north of Santa Marta de Magasca, making a few stops, hearing **Little Bustard** and seeing a constant presence of **Corn Buntings**, **Thekla Larks**, **Spanish Sparrows** and other small birds. We also saw the flamboyant **Pink Butterfly Orchid**. On arrival in Trujillo, we stopped at a small park where we found a roosting **Scops Owl** deep in a horse chestnut tree.

We completed the day back on the plains, where once another heavy shower had passed, the ground seemed to erupt with **Calandra Larks**, a **Quail** was calling, and two **Great Bustards** started displaying. A **Marsh Harrier** disturbed a group of eight **Little Bustard** which landed again close to the **Great Bustards**. Perhaps the lasting image of the day was this group dwarfed by a huge male **Great Bustard**.

2nd April 2024: Alange, Mérida, Rice fields, Campo Lugar

The weather today was a great improvement with no rain, little wind and rising afternoon temperatures. We headed south to the town of Alange, where we stopped by the huge dam to witness the spectacle of perhaps a hundred **Alpine Swifts**, calling and swooping around us. On the rocks nearby, a **Blue Rock Thrush** was perched. Entering the village, we parked beside a delightful **House Martin** colony, on arches above a mural of the town. We walked beside the reservoir for a short distance, listening to **Thekla Lark** singing and finding a Black Wheatear quite quickly, which perched on rocks amongst a wealth of spring colours.

After coffee, we moved to the city of Mérida to enjoy a walk on the Roman Bridge and through the park to an island where there is a large colony of herons and egrets. It was a very successful visit. **Alpine** and **Pallid Swifts** flew above us, where there was also a steady stream of **Glossy Ibis**. A **Western Swamphen** worked its way through the reedbed. The heronry had a large number of **Cattle Egrets** and **Glossy Ibis** and there were also pairs of **Black-crowned Night Heron** and **Grey Heron**. We watched a pair of **Penduline Tits** feeding on buds. As we returned across the bridge, we were very pleased to have great views of a **Little Bittern**.



After a picnic in the park, we drove back in the direction of base, checking fruitlessly a quarry for Eagle Owl and then making a quick visit to the rice fields, which were very quiet, although we saw a pair of **Little Ringed Plover** and Yellow Wagtail. We then crossed the Campo Lugar plains for an extremely productive finale to the day. At our first stop we watched a pair of **Little Owl** and several **Lesser Kestrel**, and then were delighted by a **Roller** flying in front of us: the first record this year in Extremadura. Further along, we watched a calling **Little Bustard** at length. And then a group of **Great Bustard** with a displaying male, whilst a **Peregrine** was being

mobbed by a **Merlin**! To cap it all, as we got onto the main road to head to base, a male **Montagu's Harrier** appeared.

3rd April 2024: Jaraicejo, Villuercas Mountains, Belén Plains



We enjoyed a day without rain, with wonderful skies of clouds and sunshine, and barely any wind. We made our first stop at the edge of the Belén Plains. No sign of Great Spotted Cuckoos, but the view across the plains was splendid. We then made our way northwards a short distance, passing the small town of Jaraicejo and rising onto a plateau of heathland dominated by broom and lavender, which were both in flower. At our very first stop we had great views of singing **Spectacled Warblers** and **Dartford Warblers**. **Thekla Larks** sang around us and a stream of vultures crossed the sky. We entered a wonderful cork oak woodland, where **Short-toed Treecreepers** were singing. As we emerged from the wood, a flurry of **Bee-eaters** flew overhead, calling. We made a second stop nearby, at the Arroyo de la Vid where there was a very obliging **Subalpine Warbler** singing, and a somewhat less obliging **Iberian Chiffchaff**, which gave a few calls and showed itself for a few times.

After coffee nearby and aborting a stop at the Miravete Pass where a team were busy cutting scrub, we headed eastwards to the glorious Villuercas Mountains. We had our picnic beside the Almonte River, watching **Short-toed Eagles**. We then made a stop in an area of cork oak woodland. This was very productive with a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** which arrived and perched on a crag for the duration of our stay. We saw a mating pair of **Peregrines** and an **Egyptian Vulture** soaring with **Griffon Vultures**.



We then made our way back towards Trujillo, crossing the Belen Plains, we took a side-track and eventually found what we were looking for: two **Great Spotted Cuckoos**, which we saw at close range, calling, perched and in flight.



Close by were a delightful pair of **Little Owls** and to cap it all, two **Rock Sparrows** came to perch on the fence too. Along the roadside verge, we found **Bug, Champagne** and **Sawfly Orchids**.



We completed the afternoon watching **Lesser Kestrels** at their colony in Trujillo.

4th April 2024: Monfragüe and River Almonte.

There was fine and warm weather today, although it felt chilly at our first stop in Monfragüe at Salto de Gitano, where we saw **Black Stork** on the nest and **Blue Rock Thrush**, as well as a plethora of **Griffon Vultures**. We then drove through the park, making a stop halfway to admire a fine male **Black-eared Wheatear** and a **Thekla Lark**. We stopped in cork oak woodland and were entertained by two male **Common Cuckoos** disputing territory. **Nuthatches** and **Short-toed Treecreepers** called. At our coffee at the edge of the cork oak grove, we watched a **Bee-eater**.

We then stopped at the Portilla del Tietar viewpoint. Here we had good views of all three species of vultures, and a distant adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. A **Subalpine Warbler** sang close by. After a couple of further stops we had our picnic at the Tajadilla viewpoint, just in time to watch a **Golden Eagle** passing overhead.

We completed the day at the Salto de Gitano, where as well as close views of vultures, we had tremendous views of **Crag Martin, Rock Bunting, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart** and **Serin**, and excellent encounters with **Black Storks**: flying, calling and perched.



We made a short stop at the River Almonte again, this time close to Jaraicejo, where a **Booted** and **Short-toed Eagles** were high overhead.

5th April 2024: El Sierro at Almaráz and return to Madrid.

It was time to bid farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and return to Madrid. But not before some final birding on the hill near Almaráz. Here **Bee-eaters** were passing overhead, whilst at our feet a wonderful show of orchids: **Naked Man**, **Woodcock**, **Early Spider**, **Yellow Bee** and **Mirror**. At a nearby quarry we saw an **Eagle Owl**, peering over the edge of her nesting ledge.

We made a final stop near the Valdecañas Dam, watching a **Short-toed Eagle** and hearing, briefly, the song of a **Cirl Bunting**.

From there it was a straight run to Madrid, with a stop half-way for a coffee. We reached the airport close to our scheduled time, with plenty of time for check-in. The end of an extremely productive and enjoyable week in Extremadura.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

BIRDS

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on three days.
2. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen on three days.
4. **Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.

5. **Mallard**: Seen everyday.
6. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín.
7. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Sierra Brava.
8. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen most days.
9. **Quail**: Heard on two days.
10. **Little Grebe**: Seen on two days.
11. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín, Alange and Mérida.
12. **Black-necked Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín.
13. **Great Cormorant**: Seen on four days.
14. **Little Bittern**: One at Mérida.
15. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen at Mérida.
16. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on the rice fields, Mérida and Arrocampo.
17. **Little Egret**: Seen on three days.
18. **Great Egret**: Seen on three days.
19. **Grey Heron**: Seen on six days.
20. **Purple Heron**: Seen on three days
21. **Black Stork**: Seen at Monfragüe.
22. **White Stork**: Seen every day.
23. **Glossy Ibis**: Seen on three days.
24. **Spoonbill**: Seen on four days.
25. **Black-winged Kite**: A pair seen near Madrigalejo.
26. **Black Kite**: seen daily.
27. **Red Kite**: Seen almost daily.
28. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen in the Villuercas and Monfragüe.
29. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen daily.
30. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
31. **Short-toed Eagle**: Seen daily.
32. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost daily.
33. **Montagu's Harrier**: Seen on three days.
34. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen on three days.
35. **Common Buzzard**: Seen almost daily.
36. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Seen on the plains and Monfragüe.
37. **Golden Eagle**: Seen in Monfragüe.
38. **Booted Eagle**: Seen every day.
39. **Bonelli's Eagle**: Seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
40. **Lesser Kestrel**: Seen on four days.
41. **Common Kestrel**: Seen on three days.
42. **Merlin**: Seen at Campo Lugar.
43. **Peregrine**: Seen at Campo Lugar, the Villuercas and Monfragüe.
44. **Water Rail**: Heard at Arrocampo.
45. **Moorhen**: Seen on four days.
46. **Western Swamphen**: Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
47. **Common Coot**: Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
48. **Red-knobbed Coot**: One at Alcollarín.
49. **Little Bustard**: Seen on the plains near Trujillo and Campo Lugar
50. **Great Bustard**: Seen on the plains near Trujillo and Campo Lugar.
51. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on three days.
52. **Stone Curlew**: Seen near Campo Lugar.

53. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on three days.
54. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen at Alcollarín.
55. **Ruff:** Seen at Alcollarín and Malpartida de Cáceres.
56. **Spotted Redshank:** Seen at Alcollarín.
57. **Greenshank:** Seen at Alcollarín.
58. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on three days.
59. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Malpartida de Cáceres.
60. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
61. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on one day.
62. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on two days.
63. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen at Campo Lugar.
64. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen at Campo Lugar.
65. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
66. **Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
67. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
68. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen on Belén Plains.
69. **Common Cuckoo:** Seen on three days.
70. **Scops Owl:** Seen in Trujillo.
71. **Eagle Owl:** Seen at Almaráz.
72. **Little Owl:** Seen near Campo Lugar and on Belén.
73. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange, Mérida and Monfragüe.
74. **Common Swift:** Seen on three days.
75. **Pallid Swift:** Seen on three days.
76. **Kingfisher:** Seen at Arrocampo.
77. **Bee-eater:** Seen on three days.
78. **Roller:** Seen at Campo Lugar.
79. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
80. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen on two days.
81. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard in Villuercas Mountains.
82. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
83. **Greater Short-toed Lark:** Seen on the rice fields.
84. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost every day.
85. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost every day.
86. **Woodlark:** Seen on two days.
87. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo and rice fields.
88. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
89. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
90. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen on three days.
91. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
92. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
93. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on two days.
94. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on two days
95. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
96. **Robin:** Recorded on two days.
97. **Nightingale:** Seen or heard almost daily.
98. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
99. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
100. **Northern Wheatear:** Sene on two days.

101. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen in Monfragüe.
102. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Alange.
103. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Alange and Monfragüe.
104. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
105. **Song Thrush:** Seen at Arrocampo.
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.
110. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
111. **Spectacled Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
112. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen on two days.
113. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen daily.
114. **Blackcap:** Seen on two days.
115. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
116. **Willow Warbler:** Heard at Jaraicejo.
117. **Wren:** Recorded on three days.
118. **Long-tailed Tit:** Recorded on fourdays.
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.
124. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
125. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
126. **Jay:** Seen at Monfragüe.
127. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
128. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
129. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
130. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
131. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
132. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
133. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
134. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
135. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on Belén.
136. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on two days.
137. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
138. **Serin:** Seen daily.
139. **Greenfinch:** Seen on one day.
140. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
141. **Siskin:** Seen on one day.
142. **Linnet:** Seen almost daily.
143. **Hawfinch:** Seen on two days.
144. **Cirl Bunting:** Heard on two days.
145. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Villuercas and Monfragüe.
146. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.