

SPRING TOUR FOR JAN SANSOM AND KEITH BARNETT

By Martin Kelsey

ITINERARY

Day 1: Sunday 2nd April

Jane and Keith arrived on time in the afternoon at 16.30, but it took some time for the luggage to get collected from the new and huge Terminal 4 at Madrid airport. We left Madrid late afternoon and after a break for coffee en route, reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo mid-evening, in time for dinner and relaxation in front of a roaring log fire.

Day 2: Monday 3rd April

A beautiful fine, sunny day and we headed to the plains north-east of the village of Belén, near Trujillo. The wonderful mimetic song of **Calandra Larks** filled the skies and it did not take us long to find displaying **Great Bustards** and **Little Bustards**, the former at rather a distance, but the latter flying close to us across the road. We also had good views of a **Stone Curlew**. We stopped for coffee at *Bar Martin* in Aldeacentenera, and then drove through dehesa, crossing the Almonte River and then through more dehesa, before reaching the western flanks of the Villuercas mountains. We stopped for lunch at a narrow gorge cut by the Almonte River and had good views of **Booted Eagle**. From there we drove the short distance to Cabañas del Castillo, a tiny village perched at the base of a crag, affording spectacular views over eastern Extremadura. A **Golden Eagle** flew over and the rocks provided a haunt for **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart**.

We then retraced our steps through the dehesa towards Aldeacentenera, stopping to catch a quick glimpse of a **Western Orphean Warbler**, which was singing in an oak tree near the road, as well as brief sightings of **Rock Sparrow**.

Day 3: Tuesday 4th April

Accompanied by Robert and Kathy, we took the road north of Trujillo through the seemingly endless landscape of dehesa, crossing the River Almonte on the way, where we stopped to look at the ancient transhumance route and the beautiful river valley. Beyond the small town of Torrejón el Rubio, the impressive escarpment of the Monfragüe Natural Park appeared, with the old Moorish castle perched close to the gorge created by the River Tajo. There we stopped to watch the **Griffon Vultures** coming to and from their cliff colony. **Black Vultures** also cruised through as did **Black Stork**. We had good views of

Blue Rock Thrush and **Black Redstart**, and saw a distant **Peregrine Falcon**. A pair of **Red-billed Choughs** also appeared from the castle.

We stopped at the small bar in the hamlet of Villarreal de San Carlos and then continued through to the picnic area at Tajadilla, where we could see the nest of a **Black Kite**, as well as **Egyptian Vulture** and more **Griffon Vultures**. **Hawfinches** also came to feed on the seeds of the planted Mediterranean Elms around the picnic area and **Azure-winged Magpies** waiting for the tables to be vacated in order to pick-up crumbs.

After lunch we proceed to the Portilla del Tiétar where the famous nest of the **Spanish Imperial Eagle** is visible. The female was incubating. We also checked the nest of the **Eagle Owl** where we saw a chick, sheltering in the shade. It was a splendid afternoon and we stopped on our way back at the River Almonte for a walk along the river bank.

Day 4: Wednesday 5th April

The morning was spent exploring the medieval centre of Trujillo, visiting the castle and taking a horse and carriage ride through the steep and narrow streets. As well as the fascinating history and beautiful buildings, fine views were also possible of **Lesser Kestrel** and **Pallid Swift**.

In the afternoon, we visited the plains south of Zorita. **Montagu's Harriers** quartered the fields, whilst **Lesser Kestrels** sat on the wires. We had superb views of **Great Bustards** displaying on a hillside (four males), with the females viewing from the periphery. **Little Bustards** called, as did **Quail** and we had good views of a **Stone Curlew**. **Great Spotted Cuckoo** were also seen. The sky seemed filled with the song of **Calandra Lark** and the simpler song of **Short-toed Lark**. The fields were full of Barbary Nut Iris and Hoop Petticoat Narcissus. It was a really beautiful spring afternoon.

Day 5: Thursday 6th April

Thursday is market day in Trujillo and this gave Jane an opportunity to see the weekly street market where the local people where fruit and vegetables, an excellent selection of fish and meats, as well as clothes and other items. Keith used the morning equally productively with some reading. Late morning we headed to Jaraicejo, where a heath dominated by French lavender provides good habitat for a range of warblers as well as a strong population of **Thekla Lark**. A pair of passage **Tawny Pipits** showed themselves well and we had excellent views of **Short-toed Eagle**. **Dartford Warblers** were singing actively right out in the open, whilst we found singing a **Subalpine Warbler** in a scrubby area alongside the Arroyo de la Vid, along with a very vocal **Nightingale**.

From there, we drove up to the Arrocampo reservoir where a good fringe of vegetation provides superb habitat for swamp birds. We quickly found singing **Savi's Warblers**, as well as **Great Reed**, **Cetti's** and **Sedge Warblers** and had

good views of **Purple Swamphen** and **Purple Heron**. A **Marsh Harrier** put up a two **Jack Snipe** and a **Common Snipe** was also seen. On the road back to the motorway we found a wonderful bank of Man Orchids.

Day 6: Friday 7th April (Sunny, mild)

Today we visited habitats were recently created by man: the large reservoir of Sierra Brava and the rice fields to the south. On the way day to stopped briefly to look at the flowers in the old olive groves on the Sierra de los Lagares: Champagne Orchids, Toothed Orchids and Tassel Hyacinth. At the first stop, near the dam of the reservoir, we found a couple of pairs of **Black-necked Grebe**, as well as numbers of **Coot** and **Great-crested Grebe**. We also found a drake **Tufted Duck**.

We then drove down to the huge area given over to rice cultivation, visiting the area near Palazuelo and Casas del Hito. Stubble remains in some fields, whilst others were ploughed and recent rain had provided pools in many of the fields. At a large pool behind an embankment we found a **Shelduck** and two male **Red-crested Pochard**. A superb view of a **Roller** near Palazuelo, and it was a newly arrived bird. We also found **Red Avadavats** and **Common Waxbill** in the rank vegetation beside the tracks. We ventured further south to Vegas Altas, another area of rice cultivation, where we found a **Gull-billed Tern** and **Collared Pratincoles** were hawking insects over cereal fields.

Day 7: Saturday 8th April

Returning to the typical plains and dehesa habitat, we spent the day near the small village of Santa Marta de Magasca and then explored the area northwards towards Monroy.

The first stop was an area of open country west of Trujillo. There we enjoyed very good views of both displaying **Great** and **Little Bustard**, as well as a **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and no fewer than about 70 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. **Montagu's Harriers** were also present as well as **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and **Tawny Pipit**. We stopped at the Almonte River, cutting a beautiful narrow valley, and watched a range of birds of prey pass along as we had lunch: **Booted Eagle**, **Short-toed Eagle**, **Black Vulture**, **Egyptian Vulture**, as well as fine juvenile **Golden Eagle**.

Near Monroy we obtained good views of a perched **Black-winged Kite**, a real gem of a bird. The afternoon was spent out on the plains, finding groups of **Griffon** and **Black Vulture** on the ground, where the size difference was immediately apparent and seeing another **Golden Eagle** – the second of the day!

Day 8: Sunday 9th April

We headed off after breakfast back on the motorway to Madrid and the new Terminal 4 for the midday check-in for the flight back to the UK.

CHECKLIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED

A very leisurely pace was taken with plenty of time to watch species at length and taking gentle walks.

1. **Little Grebe:** Present on small pools in open country.
2. **Great-crested Grebe:** Seen at the reservoirs of Arrocampo, Sierra Brava and the El Hito pool.
3. **Black-necked Grebe:** Distant views at Sierra Brava.
4. **Great Cormorant:** Recorded along the river at Monfragüe, Arrocampo and Sierra Brava.
5. **Cattle Egret:** Common and seen daily.
6. **Little Egret:** Seen most days, especially at edges of pools and rivers.
7. **Great White Heron:** One bird seen at Casas del Hito on 7th April, close to the rice fields.
8. **Grey Heron:** Singles recorded most days.
9. **Purple Heron:** Recorded at Arrocampo.
10. **Black Stork:** Several seen at Monfragüe on 4th April, including at pair at the nest.
11. **White Stork:** Common and seen daily.
12. **Gadwall:** Pairs present on small pools in the plains of Belén and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
13. **Mallard:** Seen most days.
14. **Shoveler:** Two birds present at the pool at El Hito 7th April.
15. **Tufted Duck:** one at Sierra Brava reservoir 7th April.
16. **Red-crested Pochard:** Two males at the pool at El Hito 7th April.
17. **Shelduck:** One at the pool at El Hito 7th April.
18. **Black-winged Kite:** One birds seen well north-east of Monroy on 8th April.
19. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.

20. **Red Kite:** Seen most days.
21. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo, Monfragüe, Santa Marta de Magasca
22. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost everyday, young birds at Monfragüe.
23. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost everyday.
24. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen at Villuercas, Jaraicejo and Santa Marta de Magasca.
25. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on the Zorita plains, rice fields, Arrocampo
26. **Montagu's Harrier:** Present on Zorita plains, rice fields and Santa Marta de Magasca
27. **Common Buzzard:** seen almost daily.
28. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Excellent views of breeding pair in Monfragüe.
29. **Golden Eagle:** One at Cabañas del Castillo, one over Rio Almonte south of Monroy and another north of Santa Marta de Magasca.
30. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost daily
31. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen almost everyday and in excellent numbers in both breeding areas and feeding over grasslands.
32. **Common Kestrel:** Most days.
33. **Peregrine Falcon:** Seen at Monfragüe 4th April.
34. **Quail:** Heard calling on Zorita plains on 5th April.
35. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo 6th April.
36. **Moorhen:** Seen at Arrocampo and the rice fields.
37. **Purple Swamphen:** Good views of several at Arrocampo.
38. **Common Coot:** Small numbers at Arrocampo.
39. **Little Bustard:** Excellent views on Belen Plains, Zorita plains in the Santa Marta de Magasca region.
40. **Great Bustard:** Displaying males with females seen at Belen Plains, Zorita Plains and Santa Marta de Magasca.

41. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen flying over the road on arrival in Trujillo on 3rd April and then subsequently at Arrocampo and the rice fields.
42. **Stone Curlew:** Singles seen on Belen Plains, Zorita Plains and Santa Marta de Magasca.
43. **Collared Pratincole:** Flocks feeding over the rice fields at Vegas Altas on 7th April.
44. **Little Ringed Plover:** One along river at Monfragüe and a pair also seen on the rice fields.
45. **Jack Snipe:** Two flushed by a March Harrier at Arrocampo on 6th April.
46. **Common Snipe:** Singles at Belen Plains, Arrocampo and the rice fields.
47. **Greenshank:** One at pool in plains west of Santa Marta de Magasca.
48. **Black-headed Gull:** Small groups on rice fields.
49. **Gull-billed Tern:** One at Vegas Altas rice fields 7th April.
50. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** One bird seen east of Santa Marta de Magasca 8th April.
51. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Flock of nearly 70 seen east of Santa Marta de Magasca 8th April.
52. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
53. **Wood Pigeon:** Small numbers seen most days.
54. **Collared Dove:** Small numbers seen most days.
55. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen on Zorita Plains and in Santa Marta de Magasca region.
56. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard and sometimes seen most days.
57. **Scops Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente
58. **Eagle Owl:** Two chicks seen on nest at Monfragüe on 4th April.
59. **Alpine Swift:** Small group seen at Cabañas del Castillo on 3rd April.
60. **Common Swift:** seen almost daily from 5th April.
61. **Pallid Swift:** Seen at Trujillo and Cáceres.

62. **Bee-eater:** Seen daily.
63. **Roller:** Excellent view of one on rice fields near Palazuelo on 7th April.
64. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
65. **Calandra Lark:** Common on Belen Plains, Zorita Plains and Santa Marta de Magasca region.
66. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on Zorita Plains on 5th April.
67. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
68. **Thekla Lark:** Seen at Belen Plains and heaths at Jaraicejo.
69. **Woodlark:** Seen and heard in Villuercas mountains, Jaraicejo and Santa Marta de Magasca.
70. **Sand Martin:** Seen at the rice fields and Arrocampo.
71. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily, especially near cliffs and river crossings.
72. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
73. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
74. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
75. **Tawny Pipit:** Two on Zorita Plains on 6th April and east of Santa Marta de Magasca (8th April)
76. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
77. **Wren:** Recorded almost daily.
78. **Nightingale:** Recorded daily.
79. **Black Redstart:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo and Monfragüe.
80. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
81. **Northern Wheatear:** Small numbers seen daily from 5th April.
82. **Black-eared Wheatear:** One male seen west of Santa Marta de Magasca on 8th April.
83. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo and Monfragüe, as well as Rio Almonte on 8th April.
84. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.

85. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen in Villuercas, Monfragüe and south of Monroy.
86. **Cetti's Warbler:** Heard at Monfragüe, Arrocampo and the rice fields.
87. **Zitting Cisticola:** Heard and seen almost daily in areas of tall grasses.
88. **Savi's Warbler:** Several singing at Arrocampo.
89. **Sedge Warbler:** Heard at Arrocampo.
90. **Great Reed Warbler:** Heard singing at Arrocampo as well as the rice fields near Palazuelo.
91. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on heath near Jaraicejo on 6th April.
92. **Subalpine Warbler:** One at Cabañas del Castillo (8th April) and good views of a pair at Jaraicejo on 6th April.
93. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen or heard almost daily.
94. **Western Orphean Warbler:** One in dehesa near Retamosa 3rd April.
95. **Blackcap:** Individuals seen at Jaraicejo and Palazuelo.
96. **Blue Tit:** Seen on a few occasions.
97. **Great Tit:** Seen on a few occasions
98. **Southern Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
99. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Jay:** Seen near Retamosa.
101. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
102. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
103. **Red-billed Chough:** Two birds seen at Monfragüe near the castle on 4th April.
104. **Jackdaw:** Seen daily.
105. **Raven:** Seen almost daily
106. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
107. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.

- 108. Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily, especially on plains and rice fields.
- 109. Tree Sparrow:** Two seen on rice fields.
- 110. Rock Sparrow:** Seen briefly in dehesa near Retamosa 3rd April
- 111. Common Waxbill:** Excellent views in rice fields 7th April.
- 112. Red Avadavat:** Good numbers seen in rice fields on 7th April.
- 113. Chaffinch:** Seen in dehesa near Retamosa and at Jaraicejo.
- 114. Serin:** Seen almost daily
- 115. Greenfinch:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo.
- 116. Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily
- 117. Linnet:** Seen almost daily
- 118. Hawfinch:** Seen at Monfragüe and near the church in Pago de San Clemente.
- 121. Cirl Bunting:** Seen at Cabañas del Castillo (3rd April) and at Jaraicejo on 6th April.
- 122. Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe 4th April.
- 123. Corn Bunting:** Common and seen daily.

BUTTERFLIES

There were very few butterflies on the wing, but we did find Spanish Festoon, Nettle-tree Butterfly and Red Admiral.

PLANTS

(Selected species)

Pinaceae	<i>Pinus pinea</i>	Stone/umbrella Pine
Fagaceae	<i>Quercus rotundifolia</i> <i>Q. suber</i>	Evergreen Oak Cork Oak
Ulmaceae	<i>Ulmus minor</i>	Elm sp
Caryophyllaceae	<i>Spergularia purpurea</i> <i>Silene colorata</i>	Purple Sand-spurrey Campion sp

Ranunculaceae	<i>Ranunculus sp.</i> <i>R. macrophyllus</i>	Water Crowfoot sp. Large-leaved buttercup
Fumariaceae	<i>Fumaria capreolata</i>	Ramping Fumitory
Cruciferae	<i>Matthiola sp.</i> <i>Eruca sativa</i>	A stock Eruca
Crassulaceae	<i>Umbilicus rupestris</i>	Navelwort
Leguminosae	<i>Acacia dealbata</i> <i>Astragalus lusitanicus</i> <i>Cytisus multiflorus</i> <i>Cytisus scoparius</i> <i>Lupinus angustifolius</i> <i>Medicago arabica</i>	Silver Wattle Iberian Milk-vetch White Broom Broom Narrow-leaved Lupin Spotted Medick
Oxalidaceae	<i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>	Bermuda Buttercup
Geraniaceae	<i>Geranium lucidum</i> <i>G. molle</i> <i>G. rotundifolium</i>	Shining Cranesbill Dovesfoot Cranesbill Round-leaved Cranesbill
Violaceae	<i>Viola (arvensis) kitaibeliana</i>	Dwarf Pansy
Cistaceae	<i>Cistus salviifolius</i> <i>C. ladanifer</i>	Sage-leaved Cistus Gum Cistus
Labiatae	<i>Lavandula stoechas</i> <i>Salvia verbenaca</i>	French Lavender Wild Clary
Cactaceae	<i>Opuntia maxima (=ficus-indica)</i>	Prickly Pear
Liliaceae	<i>Asphodelus aestivus</i> <i>Gagea ellipitica</i> <i>Urginea maritime</i> <i>Muscari comosum</i> <i>Narcissus triandrus papyraceus</i> <i>Narcissus bulbocodium</i>	Common Asphodel Yellow star of Bethlehem Sea Squill Tassel Hyacinth Angel's Tears Hoop-petticoat Narcissus
Iridaceae	<i>Gynandris sisyrrinchium</i> <i>Romelea ramiflora gaditana</i>	Barbary Nut Sand Crocus
Orchidaceae	<i>Orchis morio subsp. champagneuxii</i> <i>Orchis tridentata</i> <i>Orchis italica</i>	Champagne Orchid Toothed Orchid Italian Man Orchid