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Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

SPRING TOUR 5th April 2010 – 10th April 2010

Guests: Ralph Tiller

Guide: Martin Kelsey

Itinerary

5th April 2010: Collection midday at Madrid Airport and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, Pago de San Clemente, Trujillo.

6th April 2010: Plains south of Zorita and the rice-growing area near Madrigalejo (Casas del Hito, Vegas Altas and Palazuelo).

7th April 2010: Monfragüe National Park

8th April 2010: Jaraicejo, the Villuercas Mountains and Belén Plains.

9th April 2010: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Talaván Reservoir.

10th April 2010: Arrocampo reservoir and then transfer to Madrid airport.

TRIP REPORT (including a selection of Ralph's photos)

5th April 2010

Ralph arrived on schedule and by early afternoon we were leaving the airport at Madrid. It was a clear sunny day, weather which would remain settled for the whole tour. We took the A5 motorway from Madrid (stopping for lunch after about an hour on the road) and then made excellent progress with very light traffic across the plains of northern Toledo province into Extremadura. **White Storks** a plenty were seen on the drive, as well several **Black Kite** and **Griffon Vultures**. We stopped in Trujillo to watch the **Lesser Kestrels** on the roof of the Bull Ring and then reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo late afternoon.



6th April 2010

We headed south to the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. The open landscape looked wonderful with the colourful show of wild flowers: whites, yellows, blues and purples. We stopped close to a couple of piles of stones, finding a pair of **Little Owl** on one of them. As we watched them, our attention was drawn to a large white object at the back of a field opposite. At first glance it looked like a displaying **Great Bustard**, but it turned out to be two large males, face-to-face just a few centimetres apart.



They stared at each other, their bills opening, presumably making a call which to us was inaudible. As we watched, they started to fight. Ralph had set up his digiscoping kit and was extremely fortunate to record the whole sequence as a video.



The fight was aggressive, the birds pushing each other, one claspng the other's head in its bill. They edged towards a fence, sometimes almost forcing each other to the ground. As they fought, some female Great Bustards walked past, almost appearing indifferent. And then, as suddenly as it had started, the males separated, one appearing slightly injured on the head. It was an extraordinary episode. Close

by we found a group of about fifteen **Little Bustard**, including at least four males in full breeding plumage. They were all busy feeding in a crop.

Further on we stopped to watch a remarkably obliging **Roller**.



Lesser Kestrels hunted in small groups over the open country and a **Montagu's Harrier** was busy quartering the fields, whilst **Calandra Larks** circled above giving their richly mimetic song. Heading down to the rice-growing area, we stopped to watch a group of **Bee-eaters** excavating burrows in a bank and gliding past with the

sun catching their extraordinary medley of colours.



A single adult **Common Crane** was an unusual straggler from the winter, whilst just metres away **Collared Pratincoles** hawked insects, a party of about thirty of them: a unique juxtaposition of species. Nearby we found a **Black-winged Kite** and another group of **Common Crane**, this time young birds. We visited a small embanked pool where about a dozen **Garganey** were present amongst other duck. A **Booted Eagle** rested on the bank of a small island, presumably a bird on migration. A flock of **Black-winged Stilts** made a dramatic fly-past, whilst as we left a female **Hen Harrier** drifted over the rice stubble.

More **Great Bustards** were found on the cereal fields near the village of Vegas Altas, as well as a good number of passage **Northern Wheatear**.



We made a final stop beside the Sierra Brava reservoir to watch **Lesser Kestrels** around a ruined barn.

7th April 2010

The day was spent in the Monfragüe National Park, the jewel in the crown of protected areas in Extremadura. Our first stop was the viewpoint opposite the massive cliff of Peña Falcón, with a **Peregrine Falcon** visible around the rocks during most of our stay. As well as the dozens of **Griffon Vultures**, we also saw **Black** and **Egyptian Vultures**, as well as getting good views of **Rock Bunting** and **Blue Rock Thrush**. It was however, quite chilly, with a northerly wind blowing through the gorge, so we opted to head to the other side of the park, to the viewpoint of Portilla del Tiétar. We did not have to wait long there to get good views of a fine adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, soaring close-by, with the sun catching the white leading edge to the wing. Competing for our attentions were a pair of **Black Stork**, nesting on the cliff face, joined at one stage by a third bird amidst considerable commotion. A juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** made a brief appearance, but more prolonged was the view afforded to us by a **Short-toed Eagle**, gliding over the ridge opposite.

We moved to the Tajadilla viewpoint for lunch, finding a pair of **Hawfinch** feeding on the elm seeds in the picnic area and, despite the throngs of people there, were seemingly oblivious of human presence.



Nearby we encouraged **Azure-winged Magpies** to arrive to have their photos taken, placing bread on a table and waiting, just a matter of a couple of minutes, for the first wave to arrive. A male **Subalpine Warbler** was singing close by.

We made another stop at Peña in the afternoon and enjoyed superbly close views of the vultures as well as a fine male **Blue Rock Thrush**. The calmer afternoon weather had also encouraged the appearance of butterflies such as the Spanish festoon and Nettle-tree Butterfly.

8th April 2010

A beautifully clear morning with the snow-capped Gredos Mountains providing a backdrop to our morning's destination, the lavender and broom heath near Jaraicejo. As we arrived, a **Spectacled Warbler** sang nearby, a good way to start the day. As we watched, we also heard **Dartford Warblers** and a male performed a song-flight just a few metres away. The area was full of **Thekla Larks**. We walked into an attractive cork oak grove and detected a **Western Orphean Warbler** giving just brief bursts of song from the edge of a clearing. It provided equally tantalizing glimpses. A dark-phased **Booted Eagle** soared overhead as we retraced our steps to the car, and lines of **Griffon Vultures**, with the occasional **Black Vulture**, streamed out of the nearby Monfragüe National Park.

We then drove east to the Villuercas Mountains, pausing at the River Almonte to watch a **Grey Wagtail** and a pair of **White Wagtail** together in the stream. A little bit further along the road we found a singing **Rock Sparrow**, obligingly close to the road, with its rarely seen yellow throat spot visible as it sang. We visited the cliff-side village of Cabañas del Castillo, finding **Black Redstart**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Egyptian Vulture**, but particularly rewarding were the butterflies with good views of Spanish Festoon and a Swallowtail. In nearby cork-oak woodland, a **Crested Tit** gathered nesting material whilst a pair of **Red-billed Choughs**, mobbed a **Raven** over the crags above us.

We headed back through the great expanses of *dehesa* woodland, stopping to get superb views of a **Woodlark**, before crossing the Belén palins. Here we had brief views of a male **Bluethroat**, a passage bird sheltering in the shade of a bush on the verge. We enjoyed further views of **Bee-eater**, **Montagu's Harrier** as well as **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**. Large numbers of vultures were also seen descending on a carcass.

9th April 2010

Another wonderfully clear day and we explored the area of plains between Trujillo and Cáceres. In the first area we explored, to the east of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we started with excellent flight views of several groups of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, followed shortly afterward by superb views of a party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** feeding on fallow. A pair of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** was with them briefly.



Along the same track we watched at close quarters a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoos**, the male collecting caterpillars to courtship-feed the female, which waited for him in a small bush. A **Little Bustard** gave its “blowing a raspberry” courtship call

and as well as the **Calandra Larks**, we found a pair of **Short-toed Larks** feeding close to the track.



North of the village, we enjoyed close views of **Montagu's Harriers** and two male **Little Bustard**, very close to the road.



We crossed the Almonte River and took a short walk, having excellent views of three **Egyptian Vultures**, a **Booted Eagle** and a **Short-toed Eagle**. After lunch

beside the small reservoir of Talaván, and a brief stop lower downstream on the Almonte where we found **Alpine Swifts**, we took a route across the plains back to Santa Marta de Magasca. This was very productive with sightings of **Tawny Pipit**, **Black-eared Wheatear**, a group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** as well as **Great Bustard**.

10th April 2010



Another fine sunny day, but with a fresh and rather strong breeze which picked up whilst we were at the reservoir of Arrocampo. This water body acts a huge “radiator” for the Almaráz power station and has a wide fringing vegetation of reed mace, which is excellent habitat for species like **Purple Swamphen**. We saw two very quickly at our first stop, as well as at least three **Purple Heron**.



Two **Savi's Warblers** sang close-by, one quite readily found, perched high on a reed. At a second stop a **Great Reed Warbler** was singing, but unlike the Savi's, was sheltering deep in the vegetation and quite impossible to find. We had better luck with a pair of **Black-winged Kite** on nearby farmland, sitting out in the open on a dead tree. Back at the reservoir, we got a brief view of a **Gull-billed Tern**, and then, at our final stop, back at the first place we had visited, Ralph found a male **Little Bittern**, standing motionless at the edge of the water: what a magnificent way to complete the trip!



List of species seen

Generally good weather and spring migrants arriving on cue helped us reach an excellent total of **141 species of birds** over the six day tour. These are listed below.

1. **Little Grebe:** Singles near Madrigalejo on 4th April, Talaván on 9th April and at Arrocampo on 10th April.
2. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen most days on suitable water bodies.
3. **Great Cormorant:** Two birds in Monfragüe.
4. **Little Bittern:** One male at Arrocampo on 10th April.
5. **Cattle Egret:** Common and seen almost daily.
6. **Little Egret:** Seen almost daily.
7. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
8. **Purple Heron:** Several at Arrocampo on 10th April.
9. **Black Stork:** About six seen in Monfragüe on 7th April and one near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
10. **White Stork:** Seen daily.



11. **Grey Lag Goose:** Three at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
12. **Gadwall:** Seen at Casas del Hito, Talaván and Arrocampo.
13. **Mallard:** Seen almost daily.
14. **Pintail:** About 8 at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
15. **Garganey:** About ten at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
16. **Shoveler:** About 15 at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
17. **Black-winged Kite:** One at Casas del Hito on 6th April and a pair near Arrocampo on 10th April
18. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
19. **Red Kite:** Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
20. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
21. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
22. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.

23. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
24. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on ricefields and at Arrocampo.
25. **Hen Harrier:** A ringtail at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
26. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
27. **Sparrowhawk:** Recorded twice (Monfragüe and Villuercas mountains).
28. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** One adult and a juvenile in Monfragüe on 7th April.
30. **Booted Eagle:** Seen daily.
31. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen everyday, especially at Trujillo and on the plains.
32. **Common Kestrel:** Seen daily.
33. **Peregrine Falcon:** One at Monfragüe on 7th April.
34. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen or heard almost daily.
35. **Water Rail:** One recorded on the rice fields on 6th April.
36. **Moorhen:** Seen in suitable habitat.
37. **Purple Swamphen:** About six seen at Arrocampo on 10th April.
38. **Common Coot:** Seen at on reservoirs: Arrocampo and Talaván.
39. **Common Crane:** 15 immature birds at Casas del Hito on 6th April and one adult near Palazuelo on same date.
40. **Little Bustard:** About 20 birds seen near Campo Lugar on 6th April and about three near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
41. **Great Bustard:** About 50 birds seen on the plains near Zorita and near Vegas Atlas on 6th April and singles near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
42. **Black-winged Stilt:** A flock of about 15 at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
43. **Stone Curlew:** One heard near Campo Lugar on 6th April.
44. **Collared Pratincole:** Over 30 near Palazuelo on 6th April.
45. **Ringed Plover:** About six at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
46. **Little Ringed Plover:** A pair near Madrigalejo on 6th April

47. **Little Stint:** A flock of 10 at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
48. **Dunlin:** About 15 at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
49. **Common Redshank:** Two at Casas del Hito on 6th April.
50. **Greenshank:** Heard at Arrocampo on 10th April
51. **Green Sandpiper:** Four seen at Casas del Hito on 6th April. And one near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
52. **Common Sandpiper:** One at Sierra Brava on 6th April.
53. **Gull-billed Tern:** One at Arrocampo on 10th April.
54. **Black-headed Gull:** Small numbers on rice fields on 6th April.
55. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Small numbers on rice fields on 6th April.
56. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Two near Campo Lugar on 6th April and 12 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
57. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** 50 seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
58. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** See daily.
59. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
60. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
61. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen almost daily.
62. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard almost daily and two seen on 9th April.
63. **Scops Owl:** Calling each evening in Pago de San Clemente.
64. **Little Owl:** Three seen near Campo Lugar on 6th April.
65. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at River Almonte on 8th and 9th April.
66. **Pallid Swift:** Seen most mornings in Trujillo.
67. **Common Swift:** Seen most mornings in Trujillo.
68. **Bee-eater:** Seen daily.
69. **Roller:** At least eight seen on 6th April.
70. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.

71. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard drumming at Monfragüe
72. **Calandra Lark:** Seen almost daily.
73. **Short-toed Lark:** Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
74. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost daily.
75. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
76. **Woodlark:** Seen near Villuercas mountains on 8th April.
77. **Sand Martin:** Present on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
78. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
79. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
80. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
81. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
82. **Tawny Pipit:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
83. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
84. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on Rio Almonte on 8th April.
85. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
86. **Wren:** Recorded almost daily.
87. **Robin:** Singing in Monfragüe.
88. **Bluethroat:** One on Belén Plains on 8th April.
89. **Nightingale:** Seen and/or heard daily.
90. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
91. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
92. **Whinchat:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
93. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen almost daily.
94. **Black-eared Wheatear:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 9th April.
95. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Five or six seen in Monfragüe on 7th April and similarly in the Villuercas mountains on 8th April

96. **Blackbird:** Seen almost daily.
97. **Mistle Thrush:** About six seen in Villuercas mountains on 8th April.
98. **Cetti's Warbler:** Present on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
99. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Savi's Warbler:** At least three singing at Arrocampo on 10th April.
101. **Sedge Warbler:** Present on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
102. **Reed Warbler:** Several singing at Arrocampo on 10th April.
103. **Great Reed Warbler:** At least two singing at Arrocampo on 10th April.
104. **Dartford Warbler:** Several in song at Jaraicejo on 8th April.
105. **Spectacled Warbler:** At least two singing at Jaraicejo on 8th April.
106. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Monfragüe and in the Villuercas mountains.
107. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Western Orphean Warbler:** One singing at Jaraicejo on 8th April.
109. **Common Whitethroat:** Passage birds seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
110. **Blackcap:** Seen at Casas del Hito and Monfragüe.
111. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen at rice fields.
112. **Willow Warbler:** One almost daily.
113. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at Monfragüe.
114. **Crested Tit:** One collecting nest material in Villuercas mountains on 8th April.
115. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
116. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
117. **Nuthatch:** Seen at Jaraicejo and the Villuercas mountains on 8th April.
118. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen at Jaraicejo and the Villuercas mountains on 8th April.

119. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
120. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
121. **Jay:** Seen in the Villuercas mountains.
122. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
123. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
124. **Red-billed Chough:** Pair in Villuercas mountains on 8th April.
125. **Jackdaw:** Seen daily.
126. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
127. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
128. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
129. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
130. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
131. **Rock Sparrow:** One seen in Villuercas mountains on 8th April.
132. **Red Avadavat:** Many seen on rice fields.
133. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
134. **Serin:** Seen daily.
135. **Greenfinch:** Seen on two days.
136. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
137. **Linnet:** Seen almost daily.
138. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Monfragüe on 7th April.
139. **Cirl Bunting:** Recorded in Villuercas mountains on 8th April.
140. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe on 7th April.
141. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.