

## **Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo**

**SPRING TOUR 8<sup>th</sup> May 2011 – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

**Guests: Terry and Linda Osborn**

**Guide: Martin Kelsey**

### **Itinerary**

8<sup>th</sup> May 2011: Collection early afternoon at Madrid Airport and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, Pago de San Clemente, Trujillo.

9<sup>th</sup> May 2011: Plains east and west of Santa Marta de Magasca and River Almonte

10<sup>th</sup> May 2011: Monfragüe National Park

11<sup>th</sup> May 2011: Villafranca de los Barros, Alange and Mérida

12<sup>th</sup> May 2011: Pico de Villuercas and Monfragüe Castle

13<sup>th</sup> May 2011: Jaraicejo, Arrocampo and dehesa near Monroy

14<sup>th</sup> May 2011: Plains south of Zorita and rice fields around Madrigalejo

15<sup>th</sup> May 2011: Plains of Belén, Arrocampo reservoir and Portilla del Tiétar, Monfragüe, then transfer back to Madrid

## TRIP REPORT

### 8<sup>th</sup> May 2011

Terry and Linda's plan arrived perfectly on time and well before 2 pm we were leaving the airport and taking the M40 ring-road around the south of Madrid and then leaving on the A5 motorway south-west to Extremadura. It was a fine, sunny day and the traffic was very light. After a stop for a quick lunch just outside Madrid, we made good progress, crossing the plains of Castille La Mancha before entering Extremadura. As we headed closer to our destination, the landscape became more wooded and greener and we had more and more sightings of **White Stork** and **Black Kite**. We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo by late afternoon and after a cup of tea, Terry and Linda enjoyed a short walk in the lanes close to the house, easily finding **Azure-winged Magpie**, seeing **Black Vultures** overhead and hearing **Sardinian Warblers**.

### 9<sup>th</sup> May 2011

It was a warm, sunny day with hardly any wind. We headed a short distance west of Trujillo, to visit an area of plains between the town and the small village of Santa Marta de Magasca. The rain of the last few weeks had made the grass really shoot up and so the task of finding **Little Bustard** at our first stop seemed a little daunting. However, within just a couple of minutes we had found a male calling from a small rock and during our stay there we had excellent views of it. At least two other males were also found. We had our initial views of **Great Bustard** in flight and one briefly on the ground, before it disappeared out of view. **Crested** and **Calandra Larks** were singing, along with the almost ubiquitous **Corn Bunting**. We also saw **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Spanish Sparrows** perched on fences. Just a few hundred metres further on at our second stop, we managed, despite the long grass to find a **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** on the ground and it was watched in perfect light conditions. However, a passing **Black Kite** disturbed it, and as it rose, so did others, perhaps thirty or so, splitting up into calling twos and threes and affording us superb overhead views. A small party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** was present and eventually we got good views of three flying low over the ground. We then took a dirt track and reached a good vantage point. A dark phase **Booted Eagle** caught what was probably a young bird and we watched it plucking its prey on a fence post. In various directions we found **Great Bustards**, all males, some walking in a very stately gait, with tail fanned and moustache whiskers catching the sunlight.

After coffee in Santa Marta de Magasca, we made a brief stop at the Magasca River which produced **Kingfisher**, fine views of **Crag Martins**, **Red-rumped Swallows** and young **Barn Swallows**, as well as **Serin**. Every stop today, scanning skywards, would yield **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** and we watched a fine **Short-toed Eagle** glide overhead. We stopped for lunch on an area of high

ground, enjoying wonderful views of **Montagu's Harriers**. The afternoon was spent on a couple of short walks. The first was to an old drover's trail, where we found singing **Short-toed Lark** and the second beside the river Almonte. Here we found an excellent selection of birds: a beautiful male **Cirl Bunting**, a **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Common Sandpiper**, as well as a pair of **Pallid Swift**. Back at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we took an evening walk. Both **Scops Owl** and **Long-eared Owl** were heard (and there were brief flight views of the latter) whilst a **Red-necked Nightjar** called further away.

### 10<sup>th</sup> May 2011

It was a warm day with a breeze making it pleasant throughout. Today we headed north to the Monfragüe National Park, passing through the extensive *dehesa* landscape between Trujillo and Torrejón El Rubio. Once at Monfragüe we headed directly to the furthest viewpoint, the Portilla del Tiétar where we managed to find upon arrival an adult **Eagle Owl** roosting in a cork oak tree. We had a magnificent view, especially as it starting preening, at one moment showing its enormous paw-like foot. The spot was an outstanding one also for the magnificent views of **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, in perfect light and close enough to watch it being mobbed by **Azure-winged Magpies**. **Griffon Vultures** had young on their nests and overhead we saw **Black Storks**. We adjourned for coffee in the small village of Villareal de San Carlos in the centre of the park and then returned beside the Tiétar river, watching a male **Black-eared Wheatear** close to the road. We stopped for lunch in a belt of pines, overlooking the river where a **Golden Oriole** flew past and **Egyptian Vultures** flew overhead. We then moved onto the main viewpoint of Peña Falcón in the south of the park, where squadrons of **Griffon Vultures** drifted above the cliff-top and we also saw another **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. On the rocks across the river, a **Black Stork** was tending her three small chicks, whilst closer at hand a succession of **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart**, **Black Wheatear** and **Rock Bunting** all posed on the top of small crag close by. A **Honey Buzzard** drifted over. Finally we spent a few minutes watching the throngs of **House Martins** at the bridge over the Tajo River, with a few **Alpine Swifts** amongst them and brief views of a **Rock Sparrow**.

### 11<sup>th</sup> May 2011

The day was spent exploring the area south of Mérida and a very productive day it was too. We spent the morning in the intensively-managed vineyards and olive orchards of Terra de los Barros, near Villafranca. Our target here was the **Rufous Bush Robin** and almost upon arrival we found one singing and got quite close but brief views of it. Further into the area we found another, again providing rather distant views. However the area was also interesting with **Spectacled Warblers**, **Melodious Warblers** and **Montagu's Harriers** also present. We slowly went back through the olives, seeing another bird briefly in flight before we heard two **Rufous Bush Robins** singing on either side of the track. Eventually we got excellent views of one of the songsters, perched on a dead branch and showing us his plumage from all angles!

After coffee nearby we headed for Alange where a walk beside the reservoir produced two **Black Wheatears**, **Gull-billed Terns**, **Black-crowned Night Heron** and a brief but impressive glimpse of a **Bonelli's Eagle**. We stayed for lunch and were rewarded with subsequent excellent views of a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles**, in flight as well as perched.

We then paid a visit to a pair of pools set in arable land. On one (the smallest), with a fringe of exposed mud, we found an array of passage waders: **Sanderling**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Little Stint**, **Common Redshank**, **Ringed Plover**, as well as local breeding birds like **Collared Pratincole**, **Little Tern** and **Little Ringed Plover**.

We completed the afternoon on the wonderful Roman Bridge in Mérida which is not only a magnificent historic monument, but an excellent birding place. **Common**, **Pallid** and **Alpine Swift** were nesting in the arches of the bridge, whilst we also saw **Little Bittern**, **Purple Heron**, **Squacco Heron**, as well as **Great Reed**, **Reed** and **Sedge Warblers**.

## 12<sup>th</sup> May 2011

It was a hot and sunny day. We headed south-west to the southern end of the Villuercas mountains, passing the town of Guadalupe and rising on a rough road to the highest point of the range, the Pico de Villuercas, at 1,600 metres. On our way to the top we had passed through the upper limits of holm oak, through coniferous plantations, Sweet Chestnut groves and belts of deciduous Pyrenean oak, which became more stunted the higher we got. At first these oaks were in full leaf, but close to the tree-line, their buds were barely open. On the way up and we stopped to listen to a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** in full song, and obtained excellent views of this distinctive warbler, right above our heads. From the summit the views were breathtaking. Remarkably we were accompanied at this height by the sound of **Woodlark** song, whilst more prosaically, a **Dunnock** sang from the scrub. This species breeds in Extremadura above 1,500 metres, so this peak just manages to hold a few pairs. A pair of **Red-billed Chough** soared overhead, and **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting** were also present. There were several species of butterfly on the wing, including Orange Tip and the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

After lunch at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we headed again to the Monfragüe National Park for a second attempt to catch a glimpse of White-rumped Swift. This time we ascended to the castle, where again we were rewarded with superb views across the *dehesa* southwards in the direction of Trujillo. No luck with the swift, but we found an **Ocellated Lizard** and enjoyed watching Two-tailed Pasha and Swallowtails flying close to us. **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** drifted overhead, joined by the occasional **Booted Eagle** and feeding parties of **Alpine Swift**.

**13<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

It was yet another hot sunny day. We were joined by Valerie and Glyn on our short journey north-east to the lavender and broom heaths near Jaraicejo. On the journey we saw a couple of **Red Kites**, a species far less common at this time of year than **Black Kite**. A light wind had picked up when we arrived, but despite this we had several excellent views of **Dartford Warblers** singing near the path. **Corn Buntings** and **Thekla Larks** abounded here. Descending into an attractive belt of Cork Oak, we got a glimpse of a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** and a **Western Orphean Warbler**, as well as very good views of a **Melodious Warbler**. Overhead a pair of **Black Vulture** passed very close by and we also saw a **Booted Eagle**. Butterflies along the track included the **Queen of Spain Fritillary** and **Cardinal**. Nearby we stopped close to the Arroyo de la Vid reservoir and listened to a **Western Orphean Warbler** singing from a distant cork oak, we then repaired for coffee followed by lunch at the Miravete pass. To the north we could look across the Tiétar valley towards the Gredos Mountains.

We then descended to the Arrocampo reservoir where despite the afternoon heat, **Savi's**, **Great Reed** and **Reed Warblers** were singing and we managed to get views of all three. **Purple Swamphen** gave their toy trumpet calls from the vegetation or came out to bathe at the water's edge. There were good numbers of **Purple Heron** and we had two quick views of **Little Bittern**. **Marsh Harriers**, **Gadwall** and a distant **Spoonbill** were also seen. We completed the day in an area of *dehesa* west of Monroy. **Quail** called from the cereal fields and the retama blossom attracted a large number of recently emerged **False Ilex Hairstreak** butterflies.

**14<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

The hot and sunny weather continued today as we headed south to the plains near the village of Campo Lugar, again accompanied by Valerie and Glyn. The open plains proved particularly rewarding with memorable views of a **Little Bustard** standing in the middle of a track calling, several **Great Bustards**, at least four **Stone Curlew** (including a small chick), as well as **Rollers**, **Lesser Kestrels** and **Collared Pratincoles**. Although the grasses on the plains were starting to turn yellow, the flowers continued to impress, including the late spring wave of various species of thistle in flower.

After coffee in the village of Campo Lugar, we then turned our attention to the rice fields nearby. Many of them were being flooded to prepare for sowing and tractors and even a light aircraft were involved in sowing rice. We came across a field with a party of **Gull-billed Tern** and a **Whiskered Tern** and found a **Lapwing**, whilst beside us on a barn several **Tree Sparrows** called noisily. We had a wonderful stop at the Rio Rucas, resonant with the song of **Nightingale**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Great Reed Warbler**, where we had excellent views of **Common Waxbill** and **Melodious Warbler**. In the river itself, male **Pumpkinseed Sunfish** defended their nesting scrapes.

We had lunch beside the Crane Information Centre at Moheda Alta, in the shade of holm oak trees, where a village get-together was also taking place. Afterwards we stopped by the River Gargaligas, where we enjoyed several fine fly-pasts of a male **Golden Oriole**, saw a female **Little Bittern** and also watched **Red Avadavats**. We finally visited an area close to Madrigalejo, where on a small gravelly pool we found two **Spoonbill**, several **Little Tern**, **Collared Pratincoles**, a **Dunlin**, **Ringed** and **Little Ringed Plover**, as well as a drake **Teal**. Finally, we drove beside part the Sierra Brava reservoir where we found a superb male **Black-eared Wheatear** carrying food.

### **15<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

The wind had turned to the north-east and it was a noticeably fresher start to the day, but with a wonderfully clear sky, making the view of the distant Gredos Mountains spectacular. We made a short visit first of all to the Belen Plains being rewarded with sightings of two **Little Bustard** and a **Great Bustard** in semi-display, but pride of place goes to the **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: a juvenile still attached to its **Magpie** foster parents and just a short distance away a very obliging adult perched on a fence post. We then moved on to the Arrocampo reservoir where within minutes we had found what we sought for, an adult **Black-winged Kite** sitting on a nearby tree – superb views. We then paid a final visit to the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint in Monfragüe, getting an other view of the adult **Eagle Owl** and seeing a passing **Honey Buzzard**, as well as **Egyptian Vultures**, **Black Stork** and **Booted Eagle**. Just as we were leaving an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** appeared as if to leave us with one lasting memory of this place. Then it was onto the motorway and back to Madrid. We reached the airport at 15.15, perfect time for the check-in and departure.

### **List of species seen**

Particular attention was made on this holiday to enjoy a range of sites in a relaxing fashion, rather than maximising a holiday list, nevertheless an excellent total of **145 species of birds were noted**. These are listed below.

1. **Little Grebe**: Present on small pools on the plains.
2. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Arrocampo reservoir.
3. **Great Cormorant**: Seen at Arrocampo.
4. **Little Bittern**: Seen at Arrocampo, from the Roman Bridge, Mérida and on the River Gargaligas, near Madrigalejo.
5. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: One seen at Alange reservoir.

6. **Squacco Heron:** One seen from Roman Bridge, Mérida.
7. **Cattle Egret:** Seen everyday.
8. **Little Egret:** Seen at Mérida, Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
9. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
10. **Purple Heron:** Common at Arrocampo and several seen from the Roman Bridge, Mérida.
11. **Black Stork:** Seen in Monfragüe and at Jaraicejo.
12. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
13. **Spoonbill:** One distantly at Arrocampo on 13<sup>th</sup> May and two on pool at Casas del Hito on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
14. **Gadwall:** Seen on pools near Alange and at Arrocampo.
15. **Teal:** One male seen on pool at Casas del Hito.
16. **Mallard:** Seen almost daily.
17. **Honey Buzzard;** One over Monfragüe on 10<sup>th</sup> May and also on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
18. **Black-winged Kite:** One adult at Arrocampo on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
19. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
20. **Red Kite:** Seen on just three days and in single figures.
21. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
22. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
23. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
24. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
25. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
26. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen on plains near Campo Lugar and Santa Marta de Magasca and south of Mérida.
27. **Sparrowhawk:** One on Pico de Villuercas 12<sup>th</sup> May.
28. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.

29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Adults seen in Monfragüe on 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May.
30. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
31. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Two seen at Alange on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
32. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen almost everyday, especially at Trujillo and on the plains.
33. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on two days.
34. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen or heard almost daily.
35. **Quail:** Heard south of Mérida and near Campo Lugar.
36. **Moorhen:** Seen in suitable habitat.
37. **Purple Swamphen:** Two seen at Arrocampo.
38. **Little Bustard:** Displaying males seen near Santa Marta de Magasca, south of Mérida, on the Campo Lugar road and on Belén plains.
39. **Great Bustard:** About 15 (including displaying males) seen on visits to Campo Lugar, Santa Marta de Magasca and Belén Plains.
40. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen almost daily.
41. **Stone Curlew:** At least four on Campo Lugar road, including a small chick.
42. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen on pool near Alange and on Campo Lugar road.
43. **Ringed Plover:** About four on pool south of Alange on 11<sup>th</sup> May and two on pool at Casas del Hito on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
44. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on pool south of Alange and also Casas del Hito.
45. **Northern Lapwing:** One on flooded rice field near Palazuelo on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
46. **Sanderling:** One present on pool near Alange on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
47. **Curlew Sandpiper:** One present on pool near Alange on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
48. **Dunlin:** Two present on pool near Alange on 11<sup>th</sup> May and one on pool at Casas del Hito on 14<sup>th</sup> May.



49. **Little Stint:** Two present on pool near Alange on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
50. **Common Redshank:** One present on pool near Alange on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
51. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen on Rio Almonte, near Alange and at Casas del Hito.
52. **Whiskered Tern:** One near Palazuelo on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
53. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen on the rice fields and at Alange.
54. **Little Tern:** Several on pool near Alange and at Cass del Hito.
55. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen near Alange.
56. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Three or four seen at Alange.
57. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** About 8 seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and about 20 near Campo Lugar.
58. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** About 40 seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
59. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** See daily.
60. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
61. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
62. **Turtle Dove:** One seen in Monfragüe
63. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Two on Belén Plains on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
64. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard almost daily and several sightings.
65. **Scops Owl:** Calling every evening in Pago de San Clemente.
66. **Eagle Owl:** Adult seen in Monfragüe on 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May.
67. **Little Owl:** Seen on Campo Lugar road and heard one evening at Pago de San Clemente.
68. **Long-eared Owl:** One seen on 9<sup>th</sup> May at Pago de San Clemente.
69. **Red-necked Nightjar:** Calling most evenings in Pago de San Clemente.
70. **Alpine Swift:** Seen in Monfragüe, Alange and Mérida
71. **Pallid Swift:** Seen in Mérida and Trujillo.
72. **Common Swift:** Seen daily.

73. **Kingfisher**: Seen on Rio Magasca and Rio Ruercas.
74. **Bee-eater**: Seen daily.
75. **Roller**: Seen on Campo Lugar road and near Palazuelo
76. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
77. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen at Jaraicejo.
78. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains.
79. **Short-toed Lark**: Seen on plains.
80. **Crested Lark**: Seen almost daily.
81. **Thekla Lark**: Seen almost daily.
82. **Woodlark**: Seen on Pico de Villuercas and at Jaraicejo.
83. **Sand Martin**: Seen near Campo Lugar.
84. **Crag Martin**: Seen at Monfragüe and Rio Magasca.
85. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
86. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Seen daily.
87. **House Martin**: Seen daily.
88. **Yellow Wagtail**: One at Casas del Hito on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
89. **White Wagtail**: Seen almost daily.
90. **Wren**: Singing near Rio Almonte, in Villuercas and Monfragüe.
91. **Rufous Bush Robin**: Four or five seen near Villafranca de los Barros on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
92. **Dunnock**: One singing on Pico de Villuercas on 12<sup>th</sup> May.
93. **Robin**: Singing in Villuercas and Monfragüe.
94. **Nightingale**: Seen and/or heard daily.
95. **Black Redstart**: Seen at Monfragüe and in the Villuercas.
96. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily.

97. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen in Monfragüe and a male also near Sierra Brava reservoir.
98. **Black Wheatear:** One seen in Monfragüe and two at Alange.
99. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Several seen in Monfragüe and Alange.
100. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
101. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen or heard almost daily.
102. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen almost daily.
103. **Savi's Warbler:** Several singing at Arrocampo.
104. **Sedge Warbler:** One seen from Roman Bridge in Mérida.
105. **Reed Warbler:** Singing at Arrocampo, on rice fields and in Mérida.
106. **Great Reed Warbler:** Singing at Arrocampo, on rice fields and in Mérida, as well as beside the Rio Almonte.
107. **Melodious Warbler:** Singing at several sites south of Mérida, the rice fields and Jaraicejo.
108. **Dartford Warbler:** Several in song at Jaraicejo and heard calling in Monfragüe.
109. **Spectacled Warbler:** Excellent views of two males near Villafranca de los Barros.
110. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Monfragüe and heard at Jaraicejo.
111. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
112. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Seen and heard at Jaraicejo.
113. **Blackcap:** Singing on slopes of Pico de Villuercas.
114. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** One singing on slopes of Pico de Villuercas on 12<sup>th</sup> May.
115. **Spotted Flycatcher:** One beside Rio Almonte on 9<sup>th</sup> May.
116. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at several sites during the week.
117. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.

118. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
119. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
120. **Penduline Tit:** Heard only from Roman Bridge, Mérida.
121. **Golden Oriole:** Seen and heard at several sites, including Monfragüe, Jaraicejo and the Rio Ruercas.
122. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
123. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
124. **Jay:** Seen in the Villuercas.
125. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
126. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
127. **Red-billed Chough:** Pair in Villuercas mountains on 12<sup>th</sup> May.
128. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
129. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
130. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
131. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
132. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
133. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
134. **Rock Sparrow:** One in Monfragüe on 10<sup>th</sup> May.
135. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
136. **Red Avadavat:** Many seen on rice fields.
137. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
138. **Serin:** Seen daily.
139. **Greenfinch:** Seen at Monfragüe and Mérida.
140. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
141. **Linnet:** Seen in Monfragüe and Alange.
142. **Hawfinch:** Seen in dehesa near Monroy.

143. **Cirl Bunting:** Recorded beside Rio Almonte and Monfragüe.
144. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe and Pico de Villuercas.
145. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.