

## TRIP TO EXTREMADURA

27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH – 3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL, 2014



### THE EL RECUERDO COURTYARD (slightly damp)

The Team of Frances Gatens and Muriel Clark plus Andrew & June Riches arrived early at the Madrid Barajas Airport on Thursday the 27<sup>th</sup> of March at 4.30 pm which enabled us to be at El Recuerdo by 7.35 pm in daylight. En route, in the 9-seater Citroen Jumper with guide and host, Martin Kelsey, at the wheel, we observed **Spotless Starlings, Woodpigeons, Common Magpies, Azure-winged Magpies, Common Buzzard, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Black Kites, Common Kestrel and White Storks** plus **Black-shouldered Kite** and **Great Spotted Cuckoo** identified by the eagle-eyed Martin.

We were met by Claudia with Moro (the dog), and at 8 pm we were sitting down to the first lovely meal of the holiday after settling in to our excellent rooms. After the meal, we popped outside to the courtyard to listen to the calls of **Scops** and **Little Owls**.

Martin and I had looked at the forecast for the week ahead, and were none too happy when rain was forecasted for every day! So, I was not at all surprised that it was cloudy, cool and raining on the morning of Friday the 28<sup>th</sup> of March.

We had our hearty breakfasts at 8 am, and then ventured out to the local leafy lanes at 9.15 with some brollies raised! Luckily, the rain was not too heavy, and even

desisted at times. Some birds were still vocal, and surprisingly some raptors were on the wing with 2 **Black Kites** and 10 **Griffon Vultures** being spotted! Other species noted on our morning walk were **Collared Dove**, **Hoopoe**, **Green Woodpecker**, **Woodlark**, **House Martin**, **Swallow**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Wren**, **Blackbird**, **Song Thrush**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Blackcap**, **Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **Short-toed Tree-creeper**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, **Spotless Starling**, **House Sparrow**, **Spanish Sparrow**, **Chaffinch**, **Serin**, **Greenfinch**, **Goldfinch**, **Cirl Bunting** and perhaps best of all, 4 **Hawfinches** feeding on the seeds of the Southern Elm. Not a bad selection of birds for a wet, local stroll. June made the lovely comment that she would be very happy walking these local lanes for the rest of the holiday!

We had a keek in the clay pitcher to the left of the Casa Rural door to have a look at the Stripe-less Tree Frogs before having our lunches with Moro in the lounge. After this, it was back out again into the rain but this time walking over towards the Finca Santa Marta. We walked past the beautiful old church, and alongside some fields,



### THE BEAUTIFUL OLD CHURCH AT SAN CLEMENTE

leading up to the Retreat, and whilst doing so, Frances spotted a female **Black Redstart** as the rest of us were watching **Crested Larks** and **Meadow Pipits**. There was a small wet area housing a drake **Mallard** and a **White Wagtail** before we spotted a **Mistle Thrush** in an adjacent field as a **Cuckoo** was calling from nearby. We managed to have a very good look at two of these migrant birds before continuing to the Finca Santa Marta. We also came across the odd **Linnet** and **Corn Bunting** before passing the winery, and then went up an even narrower lane to look for the Fritillaries that Martin had mentioned. We could not find these but noted some Champagne Orchids instead.

On the way back, June found a lovely male **Stonechat** for us, and not too long after this, we were back in the warmth and sanctuary of our rooms. We had plenty of time for a hot shower before our 7.30 pm evening meal with wine, followed by the meeting in the log-fired lounge where we noted that we had recorded just short of 40 bird species for our first day.

The weather improved slightly on Saturday the 29<sup>th</sup> with a 7/8 cloud cover, intermittent showers and the temps ranging from 5 - 10 degrees Celsius. Martin was taking us out today, and we went along the road leading to Santa Marta de Magasca. We fared very well at our first stop when we watched a beautiful hunting male **Montagu's Harrier** as well as **Thekla Larks**, **Southern Grey Shrike**, **Grey Heron**, **Corn Buntings** and 10 **Little Bustards**.

Our second stop a little further up the hill was equally as good with sightings of 10 **Pin-tailed Sand-grouse** and **Calandra Larks** plus **Red Kites**, **Black Kites** and **Griffon Vultures** roosting on Holm Oak Trees as some **Pallid Swifts** flew over. The next stop was along a gravel road on the right where we came across 6 **Black-bellied Sand-grouse**, two 'bouquets' of **Great Bustards** (4 & 5), a distant **Little Owl**, **Short-toed Lark** and a **Black-winged Stilt**, spotted by June, at a small pond. It was Muriel who invented the new collective name for **Great Bustards**.

It was now time for a coffee break on the outskirts of Santa Marta de Magasca as the sun threatened to appear. It was warm and cosy in the café, and from the window, we could watch **Stonechat** and **White Wagtail**. When we popped out, we added **Sardinian Warbler** and a male **Spanish Sparrow**.

From here, we motored downhill and stopped, overlooking a valley where we noted a pair of **Kingfishers**. The next stop was by a pool after seeing numerous nest boxes erected for Rollers on telegraph poles. It was just a wee bit early for the Rollers, and some of the boxes were being utilised by **Lesser Kestrels**, **Spotless Starlings** and **Jackdaws**. The pool produced two **Black-winged Stilts**, a pair of **Gadwall**, a pair of **Mallard** and a pair of **Shoveler**.

Now it was time to move on to our lunching spot at the Talavan Embalse where, owing to the inclement weather once more, we ate our bountiful packed lunches in the minibus. Feeling satiated, we ventured out for a walk along a bank of this reservoir, spotting **Little Egret**, **Great Egret**, **Grey Heron**, **White Stork**, **Little & Great Crested Grebes**, **Moorhens**, **Coots**, **Mallard**, another pair of **Gadwall** and 4 **Teal** plus hearing **Cetti's Warbler** and **Water Rail**.

Next, we drove along the road towards Monroy, which would eventually take us back to Trujillo. En route, we added three **Woodchats**, a **Stone Curlew**, found for us by Frances, and at a vantage point we added two **Montagu's Harriers** and a male **Hen Harrier**. We also pulled in at a bridge over a river where we saw **Rock Bunting**, **Sparrowhawk** and a Large *Psammadromus* (Sam O'Dramus the Irish Whiskey taster) lizard.

Not long before Trujillo, we pulled in at an old watermill and aqueduct to look at nesting **White Storks** and **Spotless Starlings** plus a **Short-toed Eagle**, and an uncommon **Pheasant** whilst listening to the calls of **Cetti's Warblers**.

Our final stop of the day was at the Trujillo bullring where we had excellent views of the nesting **Lesser Kestrels** in the dry before heading back to El Recuerdo to get ready for another excellent meal. In the lounge afterwards, we noted that the bird list had reached 84 species.



Martin had forecasted that Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> would be the best weather day of the week, and this was exactly so. There were even several hours of sunshine with temps varying from 7 - 15 degrees Celsius. Before setting off however, Frances, who had been waiting in the courtyard, came in to tell us that she had just been watching a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** on a telegraph pole at the bottom of the garden! Because of the good forecast, we chose to head up to the National Park of Monfrague, firstly stopping at a lovely bridge over the River Almonte. From here, we watched **Short-toed Eagle**, **White Wagtail**, **Sand Martins**, **Crag Martins**, **Stonechat** and **Corn Buntings** before heading towards the beautiful old castle.



### **BIRDWATCHING AT THE RIVER ALMONTE**

We stopped just short of the Castle to take photos of it before parking underneath it and walking up, spotting **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Bunting**, **Chaffinches**, **Blackcaps** and a **Booted Eagle** as well as the very common **Griffon Vultures** with the odd **Black Vulture**. We chose to walk up by the easier route at the back of the castle, finding a pair of **Short-toed Tree-creepers** as we did so as well as a nesting **Black Redstart**, Spanish Bluebells and Meadow Saxifrage. It was fairly busy today being a Sunday; so we decided to leave the popular Pena Falcon site to the end of the day. This meant that our next stop was at a long bridge with several hundred pairs of **House Martins** nesting under it along with some **Feral Pigeons**.

We popped into the conservation village of Villa Real de San Carlos where we partook of lunch on solid picnic tables. Some local children came over to speak to us. From here, we moved on to the famous site for the nesting Eagle Owl but just short of this, we pulled into a lay-by where a semi-tame vixen was on the prowl for food!

Our visit to see the nesting **Eagle Owl** was very special as not only did we have good, albeit distant views, but the locally nesting pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** came along to buzz the nesting **Griffon Vultures** in spectacular fashion, which caused the **Eagle Owl** to start hissing in protest at the close proximity of the eagles! We even watched the female eagle breaking off a lichen-covered branch to take it to her nest! Frances added **Black Stork** to our list! It was definitely time for a 'sharp exit' when a busload of students arrived!

On the way back to the Pena Falcon site, we stopped at a wooded area to watch Red Deer, Holly Blue, Small Heath, Western Dappled White, Small White and a male **Girl Bunting**. This was followed by another stop at the **House Martin** bridge, and this time we had very good views of a **Bonelli's Eagle**! At the picturesque vulture nesting cliffs, we added **Peregrine Falcon**, and also watched two **Egyptian Vultures** plus a **Black Stork** at its nest.

We were back at El Recuerdo by 6.30 pm and eating by 7.45 pm. There were two couples also staying but they left the cosy lounge to us to conduct our evening bird list which now stands at a wonderful 100 species!



#### ANDREW'S EAGLE OWL

It was a little cooler on Monday the 31<sup>st</sup> March as we headed north on the motorway towards the Arrocampo Reservoir at Saucedilla. We firstly drove past the entrance to the reserve, and found a road at the back of the village to look for the very special **Black-shouldered Kite**. It required a bit of patience before a bird appeared but in the meantime, we were able to watch **Woodchat**, **Purple Heron** and **Southern Grey Shrike** whilst listening to **Cetti's Warblers**.



We moved on a little to where there was a hide overlooking two lagoons, and here we watched 5 **Black-winged Stilts**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Green Sandpiper** and a **Purple Gallinule**. We now drove to the reception building to announce our arrival, and whilst walking round the reserve, we met up with a German couple who let us make use of the first hide as they had obtained a key. Whilst walking around this area, we noted **Little Bittern**, more **Purple Herons**, **Grey Herons**, **White Storks**, **Cormorants**, **Great Crested Grebe**, over 80 **Cattle Egrets**, **Little Egrets**, **Great Egret**, **Gadwalls**, **Mallard**, **Shoveler**, **Marsh Harriers**, **Booted Eagles**, **Common Kestrel**, **Moorhens**, **Coots**, more **Purple Gallinules**, 30 **Black-headed Gulls**, 500 **Sand Martins**, **Meadow Pipits**, **Crested Larks**, **White Wagtails**, **Whinchat**, more **Cetti's Warblers**, **Fan-tailed Warblers**, **Willow Warblers**, **Chiffchaff** and **Subalpine Warbler** as well as hearing **Savi's Warbler**, **Sedge Warbler**, **Reed Warbler** and **Water Rail**.

The reception closes at lunchtime but the loos were still open, and some of us had our picnics at the tables whilst others sat in the minibus. After this, we drove to another hide just as the rain was becoming quite heavy. We remained in the vehicle until it went off before having a look at the reed beds from the raised walkway. Another **Savi's Warbler** was heard as we watched more **Cattle Egrets** and a **Purple Heron**.

From here, we went to a lovely orchid site where Muriel was in heaven looking at **Naked Men** and **Sawfly**, **Yellow Bee**, **Woodcock**, **Champagne**, **Mirror** and **Conical Orchids**! As the weather did not look too clement, we decided to return to base, driving through a very heavy shower. As we approached Trujillo, the weather improved dramatically, and by the time we reached El Recuerdo, the sun was virtually out! Because of this, we went for a local walk, finding a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoos**, a **Hoopoe** gathering food and a field with at least 200 **Champagne Orchids**!

Once again, we enjoyed a fine meal followed by coffee and an acorn liqueur before the bird list meeting with the total being 115.

On April Fool's Day, I was expecting a prank from Frances but I think that she forgot! This was perhaps our hottest day with temps reaching 18 degrees Celsius. It was therefore pretty mild with a 7/8 cloud cover and no rain.

We were with Martin once more, and he took us south to the rice-fields via the Campo Lugar road where we came across **Montagu's Harrier**, **Common Kestrels**, two 'bouquets' comprising 40 **Great Bustards**, 6 **Black-bellied Sand-grouse**, 20 **Calandra Larks**, **Meadow Pipits** and the ubiquitous **Corn Buntings**.

From here, we went to the rice-fields where we added **Marsh Harriers**, 80 **Black-winged Stilts**, 18 **Ringed Plovers**, 10 **Little Ringed Plovers**, 12 **Kentish Plovers**, **Lapwing**, 3 **Dunlins**, a **Little Stint**, **Common Snipe**, 2 **Common Redshank**, a **Spotted Redshank**, a **Greenshank**, a **Green Sandpiper**, 300 **Black-headed Gulls**, **Hoopoes**, **Crested Larks**, **White Wagtails**, **Stonechats**, 50 **Tree Sparrows** and 15 **Red Avadavats**.

We stopped for lunch at a bridge where Andrew saw a **Mongoose** and I spotted a **Kingfisher** whilst others were hearing **Water Rail**, **Great Reed Warbler** and seeing **Blackcaps** and **Chiffchaffs**.

We passed through Madrigalejo where scores of **Collared Doves** were feeding from the rice silos, and onto the Crane Centre, which was closed for the season. Near to the Centre is an attractive lake, which housed **Cattle Egrets**, **Little Egrets**, 2 **Squacco Herons**, a pair of **Red-crested Pochards** and **Mallards**.

Next, we visited a raised reservoir, which played host to scores of **Black-headed Gulls**, **Shoveler** and **Mallard**. From this raised position, we were able to look over the surrounding rice-fields to spot **White Storks**, **Short-toed Eagle**, **Booted Eagle**, 5

**Common Cranes** (remnants of the 130,000 which winter in the area), and scores of **Cattle Egrets**. We also came across a Common Tree Frog and a dragonfly as well as Small Heath, Small White, Speckled Wood, Clouded Yellow and Western Dappled White.

From here, we made our way back to Madrigalejo, but stopped at yet another attractive bridge site where Muriel was highly intrigued with the **Cattle Egrets** amongst the herd of sheep whilst the rest of us watched or heard **Water Rail**, **Iberian Chiffchaff**, **Blackcaps**, **Sedge Warbler**, **Willow Warbler** and a **White Stork** on its nest. From here, we drove past the Mayve café at the far end of Madrigalejo towards the new power station. We stopped at the wetland area to record a couple of **Little Grebes**, more **Cattle Egrets**, **Grey Heron** and **Moorhens** as well as feeding **Sand Martins** and **Swallows**.

We continued along this road and spotted a **Black-shouldered Kite** sitting on a boundary fence before heading to more rice-fields, which housed **Common Snipe**, **Little Ringed Plovers**, displaying **Lapwings**, 2 **Gull-billed Terns** and an over-flying **Spoonbill** as well as hearing **Quail**.



**ANDREW'S WHITE STORK**

Our next venue was the Embalse de Sierra Brava, which we could easily reach from these rice-fields. We noted around 300 **Shovelers** and 20 **Great Crested Grebes** on the water along with a few **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, and after looking at the nesting **Lesser Kestrels** we managed to add **Northern** and **Black-eared Wheatears**.

We were back at base by the perfect time of 6.30 pm to allow us the one hour to get ready for another fine meal. In the cosy lounge this evening, we noted that the bird list had risen to 137 species.

There were some heavy showers with the odd roll of thunder and a max of 11 degrees C on Wednesday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. This was another day out with Martin at the helm, and he firstly took us to a White Broom heath and Oak woodland site where we

noted **Thekla Larks**, **Dartford Warblers**, **Subalpine Warblers**, **Nuthatch**, **Long-tailed tits**, **Short-toed Tree-creepers**, **Chaffinches** and **Woodpigeons**.

The next stop was a bridge prior to visiting a café, and at the bridge we noted **Feral Pigeons**, **Griffon Vultures**, **Willow Warblers**, **Black Kites** and **White Wagtail**. En route to the café, a **Black Stork** flew across the road. After the café, we went up to a Eucalyptus forest area where there is a small fire station, and we had our picnic lunches in the vehicle whilst listening to Frances's stories and jokes! After lunch, we walked into a pine plantation with the hope of seeing **Crested Tits** but heard **Woodlarks** and saw a flying **Hawfinch** instead.

Some blue skies with hints of sun started to appear as we returned to the rough track to look at **Subalpine Warbler**, **Rock Bunting** and **Cirl Buntings** whilst looking over the Arrocampo Reservoir. We had two more bridge stops before Martin took us to the very special Tozo Reservoir tucked away out of sight, and here we had an excellent time watching **Little Grebes**, **Great Crested Grebes** (displaying), **Cormorant**, **Little Egret**, **Great Egret**, **10 Wigeon**, **20 Gadwall**, **Mallard**, **4 Pintail**, **10 Shoveler**, **20 Teal**, **2 Tufted Ducks**, **12 Common Pochard**, **2 Egyptian Geese**, **Moorhens**, **Coot**, **5 Common Cranes**, **10 Black-winged Stilts**, **3 Common Redshanks**, **4 Greenshanks**, **White Wagtails** and a **Kingfisher**.



### LOOKING OVER THE ARROCAMPO RESERVOIR

All that remained now was to head back for our last supper at El Recuerdo but as we arrived back at 5.35 with the sun shining, we decided to go for one last local walk. We had very good views of a singing **Cuckoo** as well as the more usual birds, which we were going to miss. There was no water coming through to our rooms but before too long, all was back to normal. We had our meal at 7.30 pm as usual followed by the cosy



evening chat, noting that our final bird tally was 146 species. With the poor weather, this was an excellent total. We had also seen 7 types of butterflies plus a few mammals and oodles of lovely flowers. The accommodation and meals had been great, and the company was especially good with the Team being in fine spirits for the whole week.

We were up early on Thursday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April as our flight was at 1135 am; so this meant that we had to leave El Recuerdo around 7 am. We made one stop at a café for a break en route, and were at the airport around 9.45 am. It had been another super holiday, and I am sure it will not be too long before we are back to see Martin, Claudia, Patrick and Moro.

Russell G Nisbet - April, 2014



SPECKLED WOOD