

**Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura  
HOLIDAY REPORT FOR MURIEL, NIGEL, BRENDA AND JOHN**

**Report by Martin Kelsey and all photos by Nigel Sprowell**

**10<sup>th</sup> May – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016**



**Itinerary**

**10<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** Transfer from Madrid

**11<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas, Moheda Alta and Palazuelo

**12<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** Plains west of Trujillo

**13<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** River Ruercas, Sierra Brava reservoir, Campo Lugar plains, Alcollarín Reservoir and rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín

**14<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** Alange, Villafranca de los Barros, Roman Bridge Mérida, River Guadiana and Alange

**15<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** Heath land near Jaraicejo, Arroyo de la Vid, Miravete Pass, Arrocampo reservoir

**16<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** Monfragüe National Park

**17<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** Piornal and Tornovacas Pass

**18<sup>th</sup> May 2016:** Saucedilla and return to Madrid

## **Trip Report**

### **10<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Transfer from Madrid**

Nigel, Muriel, John and Brenda arrived before schedule at Madrid and we headed off late afternoon, around the southern side of Madrid before joining the A5 motorway for Extremadura. We made a stop halfway for coffee and snacks, where **Barn Swallows** were nesting in the porch of the cafeteria. We reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo mid-evening, with a **Nightingale** singing to welcome the group for their third visit to Extremadura.

### **11<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas, Moheda Alta and Palazuelo**

There were heavy showers and it was an overcast day. We travelled south-east, starting the morning in an area of rough pasture near Madrigalejo where we had fine views of a **Purple Heron** and **Squacco Heron** beside an old gravel working. Nearby we found two pairs of **Turtle Doves** and enjoyed excellent views of them. **Bee-eaters** were also present along the adjacent fence.

After coffee in the village of Vegas Altas, we explored the muddy rice fields behind the village, finding a **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Dunlin** and **Ringed Plovers**. Small groups of **Gull-billed Tern** were also present. On the wires beside the village we watched **Lesser Kestrels**.

We had lunch in the picnic area of Moheda Alta and then returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo to allow John, who was feeling unwell, to rest. The remainder of us returned to the rice fields near Palazuelo. Here we found a group of **Collared Pratincoles** which were very obliging, but had more distant views of **Gull-billed** and **Whiskered Terns**.

### **12<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Plains west of Trujillo**

The day started overcast but dry, but from late morning there were heavy showers. We spent the day in the plains to the west of Trujillo. At our first stop the group was reacquainted to the local larks: **Thekla**, **Crested**, **Calandra** and **Short-toed**. We then visited a second area where **Rollers**, along with **Lesser Kestrels** and **Jackdaws** were occupying nest boxes on telegraph poles. On a pylon was perched an adult **Spanish**

**Imperial Eagle** and we enjoyed a prolonged view of this magnificent bird, with the city of Cáceres as a backdrop.



From the same spot we also watched some magnificent **Great Bustards** and a group of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, as well as a male **Montagu's Harrier**. **Calandra** and **Crested Larks** sang around us and a fine **Hoopoe** also put in an appearance.

After coffee, we stopped beside the River Tamuja but with a shower of rain on its way, we found a sheltered picnic site for our lunch. Then there was a break in the clouds and we returned to the Tamjua, where we watched a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** soaring across the impressive landscape. A **Booted Eagle** was also seen there.





We then made our way back across the plains to Trujillo, making frequent stops, and seeing amongst other birds more **Montagu's Harriers**, parties of **Spanish Sparrows** and a **Golden Eagle** perched in a tree.

**13<sup>th</sup> May 2016: River Ruercas, Sierra Brava reservoir, Campo Lugar plains, Alcollarín Reservoir and rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín**

There was no rain today, but it was a rather windy day with generally overcast conditions.

Our first stop was the River Ruercas, south of Zorita. Here the small river, with dense growth of willows and reed mace, echoed with the sound of **Nightingales**, **Golden Orioles**, **Great Reed Warblers**, **Melodious** and **Cetti's Warblers**. Here we had good views of **Common Waxbills** and **Tree Sparrows**.

We stopped briefly beside the vast Sierra Brava reservoir where the water surface was dotted by **Great Crested Grebes** and then crossed the plains of Campo Lugar. Along there we had superb views of **Rollers** and **Calandra Larks**. **Lesser Kestrels** hovered over the meadows.

At the Alcollarín reservoir we had lunch at the picnic area next to a small pool where several **Spoonbill** were present. We spent an hour or so exploring the reservoir, finding

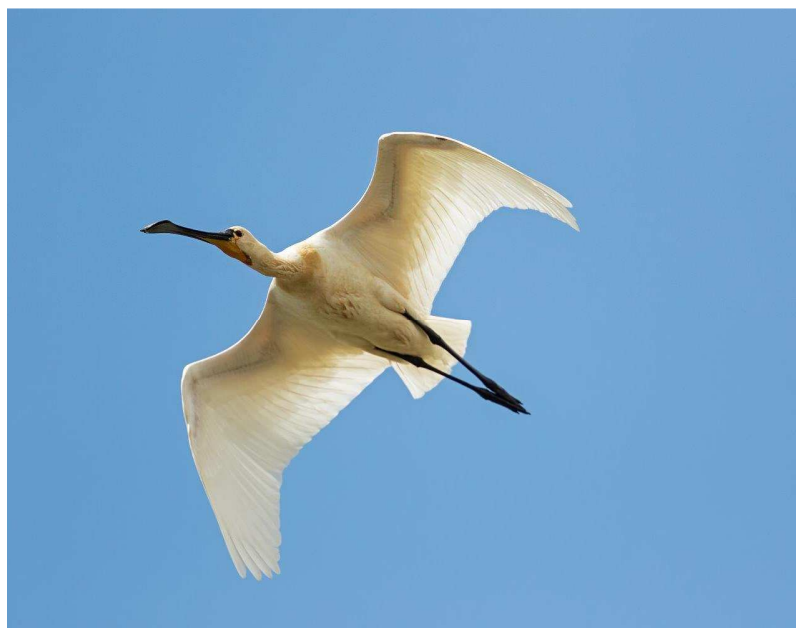
a **Ruddy Shelduck** and a few **Black-necked Grebes** before returning to the rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín. Here on just two small fields we came across a nice selection of waders, including eleven **Sanderling** (some in breeding plumage), 10 **Black** and 12 **Whiskered Terns**, several **Gull-billed Terns** and a **Mediterranean Gull** amongst the numerous **Black-headed Gulls**.

**14<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Alange, Villafranca de los Barros, Roman Bridge Mérida, River Guadiana and Alange**

Again it was a day with no rain and with more sun, although a fresh wind was blowing most of the time.

We headed south, making our first stop near Alange where we had a great view of an adult **Eagle Owl** on a rocky outcrop. We continued south to Villafranca de los Barros where we entered a vast landscape of vineyards and olive groves. **Crested Larks** abounded and we heard a **Little Bustard** calling, but our target was more elusive. We heard a **Rufous Bush Chat** singing as we got out of the vehicle, but could not locate the bird. However, another one was watched albeit distantly as it sang and foraged on the ground.

After coffee, we returned north to Mérida where we had lunch beside the river Guadiana within sight of the Roman Bridge, the longest in the world. We then walked on the bridge, obtaining good views of **Alpine**, **Common** and **Pallid Swift**, as well as **Glossy Ibis**, **Spoonbill**, **Common Waxbills** and **Purple Swamphen**.





The first part of the afternoon was spent walking beside the Guadiana River south of Mérida in an area full of **Nightingale** song. Nigel and Martin also heard an **Isabelline Warbler** singing, but it was in very dense cover and impossible to see. We finished the afternoon with a walk beside the Alange reservoir where we enjoyed watching a pair of **Black Wheatear**, as well as **Thekla Larks**, **Common Kestrel** and **Gull-billed Terns**.

**15<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Heath land near Jaraicejo, Arroyo de la Vid, Miravete Pass, Arrocampo reservoir**

A dry and generally sunny day, which was ideal for our destinations today. We started on the heath near Jaraicejo where as well as numerous **Dartford Warblers** and **Thekla Larks** we found a singing **Spectacled Warbler**. We then stopped beside the Arroyo de la Vid river, where **Nightingales**, a **Melodious** and a **Subalpine Warbler** were singing. We heard a distant **Western Orphean Warbler** singing and with a combination of luck and patience, obtained excellent views of a pair. **Tongue Orchids** grew in profusion near the path.



After coffee, we stopped at the Miravete Pass for our picnic. Here we had good views of a **Short-toed Treecreeper** (found by Muriel) and heard **Crested Tit** and **Common Redstart**. Nearby we had great views of a pair of **Black-eared Wheatears**. The afternoon was spent beside a part of the Arrocampo marsh where we enjoyed watching a female **Little Bittern** and had brief views of **Penduline Tit** and **Savi's Warbler**. But a particularly memorable moment was watching a dark-phase **Booted Eagle** stooping close by onto a party of **Barn Swallows**, successfully taking one.

### **16<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Monfragüe National Park**

No visit to Extremadura is complete without a day in Monfragüe National Park and we enjoyed fine weather conditions throughout. We went first to the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. There was no sign when we arrived of the **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, but we were entertained by **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Bunting**, **Egyptian Vultures** and **Black Storks**, as well as the coming and goings of the **Griffon Vultures** at their colony. Eventually we watched the **Spanish Imperial Eagle** in flight gliding and soaring rather distantly, and then it was found perched much closer on a rock at the top of the crag, looking very majestic.

After coffee we enjoyed a few minutes in the adjacent cork oak woodland, getting a couple of sightings of **Golden Orioles**. Just down the road we stopped to admire an incubating **Egyptian Vulture** on its nest.

We had lunch amongst pines with a superb view across the Tiétar River, with **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** in sight almost all of the time. We stopped beside a small gorge and had a superb view of a perched male **Golden Oriole** and then spent most of the afternoon at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint, where **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting** afforded us great sightings. In the **Black Stork's** nest visible we could see four chicks, downy white with yellow bills.

We made our final stop below the castle where amongst the throngs of **House Martins**, we had good views of a **White-rumped Swift**.

### **17<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Piornal and Tornovacas Pass**

Today was our trip to the Gredos Mountains. It remained dry all day, although there were some cloudy periods.

We stopped first of all at the Piornal Pass, having climbed through Pyrenean oak woodland, where **Early Purple Orchids** were in flower. At the pass we wandered in a group of pines where **Western Bonelli's Warblers** were seen, a **Common Redstart** and **Firecrest** were singing and **Coal** and **Crested Tits** were also present. In the scrub in the vicinity were **Common Whitethroat**, **Melodious** and **Subalpine Warblers**.

We stopped for coffee in Piornal itself watching the large colony of **Pallid Swifts**.



We then drove up the Jerte valley, one of the most important cherry-growing areas in Spain, to the Tornovacas Pass at over four thousand feet above sea-level, on the frontier with Castilla y León. Lunch was at a superb viewpoint looking down the valley. Here we spent the afternoon walking beside the broom scrub, eventually getting views of **Ortolan Buntings** as well as a fine **Red-backed Shrike**. **Dartford Warbler** and **Melodious Warbler** were singing and we also saw two **Carrion Crow** mobbing a **Booted Eagle**.

#### **18<sup>th</sup> May 2016: Saucedilla and return to Madrid**

At 09.00 we bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and headed in the direction of Madrid, but making a spot in the area north-west of the Arrocampo Reservoir. Here we had superb views of a feeding **Black-crowned Night Heron**, as well as **Lapwing**, **Common Redshank** and a couple of **Common Shelduck**. In the area we stopped to watch and photograph **Bee-eaters** and came across two **Great-spotted Cuckoo** as well as getting a rather distant view of a **Black-winged Kite** in flight.





We then visited Charco Salado where we enjoyed watching a foraging **Purple Heron**, as well as a party of **Spoonbills**. Through the *dehesa* woodland, we had brief views of **Rock Sparrow**, as well as several **Woodchat Shrikes**.

It was then time to return to the motorway. As we entered Madrid a pair of **Ring-necked Parakeets** flew across the road. We arrived for the check-in at Madrid Airport in very good time.

### **Bird List**

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
2. **Gadwall**: Seen on several days on reservoirs and small pools.
3. **Mallard**: Seen almost daily.
4. **Shoveler**: A drake at Alcollarín Reservoir on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
5. **Common Shelduck**: Two at Vegas Altas on 11<sup>th</sup> May, two at Alcollarín Reservoir on 13<sup>th</sup> May and two near Saucedilla on 18<sup>th</sup>.
6. **Ruddy Shelduck**: One at Alcollarín Reservoir on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
7. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on most days.
8. **Pheasant**: Two males in combat at Vegas Altas on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
9. **Quail**: Heard on the plains.
10. **Little Grebe**: Seen most days.
11. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Sierra Brava, Alcollarín, Alange and Mérida.
12. **Black-necked Grebe**: Several at Alcollarín Reservoir on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
13. **Great Cormorant**: Seen at most large water bodies.
14. **Little Bittern**: Three or four females at Arrocampo on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
15. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: One at Mérida and one near Saucedilla on 18<sup>th</sup> May.
16. **Squacco Heron**: One near Madrigalejo on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
17. **Cattle Egret**: Seen almost daily.

18. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
19. **Great Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 13<sup>th</sup> May, Mérida on 15<sup>th</sup> and Saucedilla on 18<sup>th</sup>.
20. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
21. **Purple Heron:** Seen near Madrigalejo on 11<sup>th</sup>, Mérida on 15<sup>th</sup> and Arrocampo.
22. **Black Stork:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 15<sup>th</sup> May and Monfragüe on 16<sup>th</sup>.
23. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
24. **Glossy Ibis:** Two seen at Mérida on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
25. **Spoonbill:** Individuals seen at rice fields and Mérida, and small groups at Alcollarín and Charco Salado.
26. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen on plains, Jaraicejo and Monfragüe.
27. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
28. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on plains on 12<sup>th</sup> May and in Monfragüe on 16<sup>th</sup>.
30. **Golden Eagle:** Seen on plains on 12<sup>th</sup> May.
31. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen most days.
32. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost every day.
33. **Bonelli's Eagle:** A pair near Santa Marta de Magasca on 12<sup>th</sup> May.
34. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
35. **Red Kite:** Seen most days.
36. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on rice fields, Mérida and Arrocampo.
37. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen on plains on 12<sup>th</sup> May.
38. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
39. **Black-winged Kite:** One near Saucedilla on 18<sup>th</sup> May.
40. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen daily.
41. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
42. **Moorhen:** Seen on several days.
43. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
44. **Common Coot:** Seen on large water bodies.
45. **Little Bustard:** Calling near Villafranca de los Barros on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
46. **Great Bustard:** Seen on plains on 12<sup>th</sup> May and from motorway near Jaraicejo on 18<sup>th</sup>.
47. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on rice fields, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
48. **Stone Curlew:** One seen near Rivr Ruercas on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
49. **Collared Pratincole:** Seen on rice fields.
50. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields on 11<sup>th</sup> May and 13<sup>th</sup> (when about 30 seen) and four near Saucedilla 18<sup>th</sup>.
51. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
52. **Northern Lapwing:** One near Saucedilla 18<sup>th</sup> May.
53. **Curlew Sandpiper:** One near Vegas Altas on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
54. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields on 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> (when about 30 seen).
55. **Little Stint:** Two near Puebla de Alcollarín on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
56. **Sanderling:** 11 near Puebla de Alcollarín on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

57. **Common Redshank:** Three near Vegas Altas on 11<sup>th</sup> May and one near Saucedilla 18<sup>th</sup>.
58. **Greenshank:** Several near Vegas Altas on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
59. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen on rice fields on 11<sup>th</sup> May and three near Saucedilla 18<sup>th</sup>.
60. **Whiskered Tern:** Three on rice fields on 11<sup>th</sup> May and 12 near Puebla de Alcollarín on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
61. **Black Tern:** Ten near Puebla de Alcollarín on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
62. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen on rice fields, Alange and Arrocampo.
63. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on rice fields.
64. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Two on rice fields on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
65. **Mediterranean Gull:** One on rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín on 13<sup>th</sup> May.
66. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Small group on plains on 12<sup>th</sup> May.
67. **Ring-necked Parakeet:** Two in Madrid on 18<sup>th</sup> May.
68. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
69. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
70. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
71. **Turtle Dove:** Four near Madrigalejo on 11<sup>th</sup> May and seen in Monfragüe.
72. **Common Cuckoo:** Seen and/or heard daily.
73. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Two near Saucedilla on 18<sup>th</sup> May.
74. **Scops Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente.
75. **Eagle Owl:** Adult seen at Alange on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
76. **Little Owl:** Seen on two days.
77. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Mérida and Monfargüe.
78. **Common Swift:** Seen daily.
79. **Pallid Swift:** Seen on several days.
80. **White-rumped Swift:** One at Monfragüe on 16<sup>th</sup> May.
81. **Kingfisher:** Seen on two days.
82. **Bee-eater:** Seen daily.
83. **Roller:** Seen on plains.
84. **Hoppoe:** Seen daily.
85. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen on three days.
86. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
87. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on the plains.
88. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
89. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
90. **Woodlark:** Seen at Miravete Pass and Charco Salado.
91. **Sand Martin:** Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
92. **Crag Martin:** Seen on most days.
93. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
94. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
95. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
96. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on rice fields.



97. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
98. **Wren:** Seen daily.
99. **Dunnock:** Seen on 17<sup>th</sup> May in Gredos Mountains.
100. **Robin:** Singing in Monfragüe and Gredos Mountains.
101. **Nightingale:** Seen daily.
102. **Rufous Bush Robin:** One seen at Villafranca de los Barros on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
103. **Black Redstart:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente and Monfragüe.
104. **Common Redstart:** Singing at Miravete Pass on 15<sup>th</sup> May and Pironal on 17<sup>th</sup>.
105. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
106. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Pair near Jaraicejo on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
107. **Black Wheatear:** Pair at Alange on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
108. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Alange and Monfragüe.
109. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
110. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Gredos Mountains.
111. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded almost daily.
112. **Zitting Cisticola:** Recorded almost daily.
113. **Savi's Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
114. **Reed Warbler:** Seen in rice fields, Mérida and Arrocampo.
115. **Great Reed Warbler:** Recorded on rice fields and at Mérida.
116. **Melodious Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
117. **Isabelline Warbler:** Singing beside River Guadiana on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
118. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 15<sup>th</sup> May and in Gredos.
119. **Spectacled Warbler:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
120. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 15<sup>th</sup> May, in Monfragüe and in Gredos.
121. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen on several days.
122. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
123. **Common Whitethroat:** Seen in Gredos Mountains on 17<sup>th</sup> May.
124. **Blackcap:** Seen beside River Ruercas and also in Gredos Mountains.
125. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** Seen in Gredos Mountains on 17<sup>th</sup> May.
126. **Spotted Flycatcher:** One seen briefly near Trujillo on 12<sup>th</sup> May.
127. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
128. **Crested Tit:** Heard at Miravete and Piornal.
129. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
130. **Great Tit:** Seen daily.
131. **Coal Tit:** Calling at Piornal.
132. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen on three days.
133. **Firecrest:** Singing at Piornal on 17<sup>th</sup> May.
134. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Arrocampo on 15<sup>th</sup> May.
135. **Golden Oriole:** Seen on several days.
136. **Southern Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.

- 137. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
- 138. **Red-backed Shrike:** A male at Tornovacas Pass on 17<sup>th</sup> May.
- 139. **Jay:** Seen at Jaraicejo and in the Gredos.
- 140. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
- 141. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
- 142. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
- 143. **Carion Crow:** Seen at Tornovacas Pass on 17<sup>th</sup> May.
- 144. **Raven:** Seen daily.
- 145. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
- 146. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
- 147. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost every day.
- 148. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
- 149. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen near Charco Salado on 18<sup>th</sup> May.
- 150. **Common Waxbill:** Seen at River Ruercas and at Mérida.
- 151. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
- 152. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
- 153. **Serin:** Seen daily.
- 154. **Greenfinch:** Seen at Mérida on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
- 155. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
- 156. **Linnet:** Seen almost daily.
- 157. **Hawfinch:** Seen in Gredos Mountains on 17<sup>th</sup> May.
- 158. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen on three days.
- 159. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe and Gredos Mountains.
- 160. **Ortolan Bunting:** Seen Tornovacas Pass on 17<sup>th</sup> May.
- 161. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.