

## **HOLIDAY REPORT FOR GILL, BRENDA, PETER AND PAUL**

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

#### **Itinerary**

**14<sup>th</sup> March 2016:** Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

**15<sup>th</sup> March 2016:** Exploring the plains west of Trujillo

**16<sup>th</sup> March 2016:** Plains of Campo Lugar, the area near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and Casas del Hitos.

**17<sup>th</sup> March 2016:** Monfragüe National Park

**18<sup>th</sup> March 2016:** Alange dam, the Roman Bridge at Mérida and the rice fields near Palazuelo.

**19<sup>th</sup> March 2016:** Alcollarín Reservoir, the Arroyo de la Vid, Jaraicejo heathlands and River Almonte.

**20<sup>th</sup> March 2016:** Arrocampo Reservoir, Charco Salado and return to Madrid.



## TOUR REPORT

### 14<sup>th</sup> March 2016: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Martin met Gill, Brenda, Peter and Paul at Terminal One at Madrid Airport at 15.30 and we had a good run from the airport, around the southern side of Madrid and on to the A5 motorway for Extremadura. It was a sunny afternoon and during the journey we saw good numbers of both **Red Kites** and **White Storks**. We paused for a short break halfway on the journey, where in the service station forecourt **Crested Larks** were present, as well as **Zitting Cisticolas** and **Barn Swallows**. As we continued our journey a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** was seen flying across the motorway. We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 19.00, with dinner and a log fire ready to welcome us.

### 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016: Exploring the plains west of Trujillo



It was a generally overcast day with some rain in the afternoon. The wind was light but felt fresh at times. As we set off, we watched **Azure-winged Magpies** in the garden. Just twenty minutes from the house we made our first stop at the edge of woodland



looking across open mixed farming country. A fine **Woodchat Shrike** was on the fence beside the road and we got excellent views of an **Iberian Grey Shrike** perched nearby. As we stood, a party of eight **Great Bustard** flew across our view: big powerful fliers. **Corn Buntings** sang from all quarters, **Crested Larks** afforded us excellent views whilst **Red Kites** glided overhead. Just a little further on we stopped to admire a party of about 20 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** feeding in a large pasture. About ten **Great Bustards** were also present in the field and a **Little Bustard** flew past us, landing and promptly disappearing in tall vegetation. On the ground a **Black Vulture** stood tall near the skyline, whilst not far away the much smaller **Egyptian Vulture** offered us a good comparison. Close to us, an **Iberian Grey Shrike** was watched starting to impale a prey item on a barbed wire fence, before changing its mind and flying off.

We then took a walk along a dirt track, taking in the choice of larks to watch: **Thekla**, **Crested** and **Calandra**. More **Great Bustards** were present, including one male about to start displaying. We also saw a **Black Kite** drifting over.

Following coffee in Santa Marta de Magasca (where we were entertained by House Martins) we paused beside the River Tamuja and rewarded by good views of a pair of **Short-toed Eagles** and four **Red-rumped Swallows**. We then headed north, past the village to have lunch beside the River Magasca. Here we had excellent views of a **Golden Eagle** soaring close by, as well as **Cirl Bunting**, **Crag Martins**, another **Short-toed Eagle** and a **Sparrowhawk**. In the river, **Stripe-necked Terrapins** were basking in the sun.

After lunch we returned to the open plains, where we watched a pair of **Hen Harrier** quartering a field and two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** in flight. A **Painted Lady** butterfly basked in the sun on the path in front of us.

We then walked along an ancient drovers' trail where we had excellent views of **Calandra Larks** and rather distant views of two **Little Owls** and an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, which soared against a rather grey sky.

On our return to Trujillo we had an unexpected sighting of an adult **Eagle Owl** and enjoyed the spectacle of a mass of more than a thousand **Spanish Sparrows**.

### **16<sup>th</sup> March 2016: Plains of Campo Lugar, the area near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and Casas del Hitos.**

It was a misty start, but the cloud broke up quickly thanks to a fresh westerly wind, with the afternoon becoming warm and sunny.

We headed south to the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. Here we were almost immediately rewarded by the sight of a fine group of male **Great Bustards**, including one bird in full display. There was a wonderful selection of larks and also more than a hundred **Golden Plover**, several already in breeding plumage. As we progressed

across the plains, a careful scan on one field yielded two pairs of **Stone Curlew**, as well as distant **Lesser Kestrels**.

We then visited a small gravel pit near Madrigalejo where **Little Grebe**, **Moorhen** and a good number of **Common Chiffchaffs** were present, as well as **White Stork** and **Cattle Egret**. **Cetti's Warblers** sang from the reed mace.



We had lunch in the *dehesa* woodland at Moheda Alta, which was a beautiful setting with the ground covered with wild flowers. We enjoyed a lovely walk through the area, finding species like **Pink Butterfly** and **Sawfly Orchids**. The path took us to a hide overlooking some flooded fields where there was a good selection of waders, including over 70 **Black-winged Stilt**, **Ruff**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Common Redshank**, a **Shelduck** and **Water Pipit**. We ended the afternoon, passing the huge thermal-solar plants of Casas del Hitos, near to which we watched more **Golden Plover** on muddy rice fields. On the nearby Sierra Brava reservoir there were 24 **Common Shelducks** well as two **Grey Lag** and two **Egyptian Geese**, as well as large numbers of **Great Crested Grebes**. The afternoon sunshine brought out an immaculate **Swallowtail** butterfly, feeding on **Undulate Anchusa**.

### 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016: Monfragüe National Park

It was a clear and sunny day, thus perfect for our visit to the Monfragüe National Park. We stooped at first in front of the massive cliff of Peña Falcon, where dozens of **Griffon Vultures** soared and even more were present perched on the rock itself. We watched a **Peregrine** soaring amongst the vultures, looking tiny in comparison. We enjoyed wonderful views of **Black Storks**, including two birds at their nests, as well as **Blue Rock Thrush**. From there we continued through the park, to stop at the Portilla del Tiétar. Here we had great views of a **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, the sun catching its pure-white forewing magnificently. **Egyptian** and **Black Vultures** were present alongside the **Griffon Vultures** and at one moment a **Black Stork** glided effortlessly in front of the rock face. Closer at hand, there was an engaging **Firecrest** feeding in a small holm oak just in front of us, whilst on the river we were thrilled to watch an **Otter** swimming towards the bank.

We had coffee surrounded by a grove of Cork Oak trees and then returned through the park, with a picnic at the Tajadilla viewpoint. Here we found a singing **Subalpine Warbler**, and had views of several **Black Kites** and a **Short-toed Eagle**. Close by, we admired a magnificent geological formation, but were soon distracted first by a **Sardinian Warbler** and then by the sight of a **Bonelli's Eagle** being mobbed by **Ravens**!

We then made a stop beside the Tajo River, where there is a submerged Medieval bridge and were soon rewarded by another view of a **Bonelli's Eagle** soaring over the hillside, as well as another **Black Stork**.

Beside the new road bridge, hundreds of **House Martins** gave us a wonderful spectacle, as well as close fly-by **Black Kites**. A **Large Tortoiseshell** and **Cleopatra** butterflies caught our attention, but best of all was a very obliging male **Hawfinch** which remained still in a tree long enough for us all to get prolonged views through the telescope.

On our return home, we stopped in Trujillo to watch **Pallid Swifts** and **Lesser Kestrels** the latter also at close quarters at the Bull Ring at the edge of town.

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### 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016: Alange dam, the Roman Bridge at Mérida and the rice fields near Palazuelo.

In contrast to yesterday, there was light rain on and off through the day.

We made our first stop beside the massive dam of Alange, where **Alpine Swifts** chased each other around in tight, fast packs. Taking a walk beside the reservoir, we soon had superb views of a male **Black Wheatear**, which perched obligingly on a pole near to us. An early **Gull-billed Tern** flew past. **Blue Rock Thrushes** were also present. In the

shrubs close to the water's edge, several **Common Chiffchaff** were feeding and there we found an **Iberian Chiffchaff**, looking much brighter with a vivid yellow supercilium. The visit was then capped-off with two **Egyptian Vultures**. After coffee, we then drove to the wonderful Roman Bridge in Mérida, spanning the Guadiana River, the longest surviving structure of its sort in the world. The water level was quite low, revealing shingle banks on which there were **Little Ringed Plovers**. At the edge of the emerging vegetation **Purple Swamphen** fed and we saw **Glossy Ibis** on several occasions. Particularly enchanting was the **Penduline Tits** which were coming down to collect nesting material.

We had our picnic in the park beside the river, where a small group of male **Siskins** were singing.

The afternoon was spent in the rice fields near Palazuelo. Most of the fields were dry bare earth but on those which were muddy, we did find a few **Little Ringed Plover** and **Green Sandpiper**. On a stonier field we found two **Stone Curlew** and a fine **Woodchat Shrike**.

#### **19<sup>th</sup> March 2016: Alcollarín Reservoir, the Arroyo de la Vid, Jaraicejo heathlands and River Almonte**

It was overcast throughout the morning, with sunnier spells and passing showers in the afternoon, with a fresh westerly wind. As we left the house in the morning we could hear a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** drumming.

We visited the Alcollarín Reservoir in the morning, situated to the south of the town of Zorita. At our first stop we watched the thrilling attempts of a large young female **Peregrine** harrying a **Black-headed Gull**. There was a good selection of duck in the bay of the reservoir that we surveyed, whilst overhead and throughout the morning there was a steady passage of **Black Kites**. On the western bank of the reservoir, close to two **Egyptian Geese** was a fine **Ruddy Shelduck**, and we also had good views of **Pintail** and **Black-necked Grebe**.

We paused for coffee, close to the silo at Campo Lugar where a large number of **House Martins** were nesting. We returned briefly to Alcollarín on a tipoff from other birders and saw the **Ferruginous Duck** that they had found there.

We then headed north, past the village of Jaraicejo and had a picnic beside the Arroyo de la Vid. This was followed by a lovely afternoon walk across a heathland of broom and lavender where we had a couple of views of **Dartford Warbler**. From the heathland there was a beautiful glade of cork oaks where **Angel's Tears Narcissus** was in flower. Here we heard **Crested Tits** singing and had excellent views of **Short-toed Treecreeper**, but perhaps most memorable was the courting pair of **Black Stork**, flying in synchrony above us. As we left we had a close view of **Woodlark**.





We ended the day beside the Almonte River where three bridges spanned. Here again was a **Woodchat Shrike** and a nice array of wagtails, including a **Grey Wagtail**. The rain increased and eventually drove us back to the vehicle.

#### **20<sup>th</sup> March 2016: Arrocampo Reservoir, Charco Salado and return to Madrid.**

A **Green Woodpecker** was calling at Pago de San Clemente first thing. We left at 09.00 and drove north-east to the Arrocampo Reservoir. This body of water, created to provide cooling water for the Almaráz nuclear power, has a fringe of Lesser Reed Mace, providing excellent habitat for many marshland birds. At our first stop we had good views of **Purple Swamphen** and a **Squacco Heron** in flight. From there we stopped at an area of more extensive vegetation, where a fine adult **Spoonbill** stood perched on top of a pile of reeds. A **Bluethroat** sang close by and rewarded us with some excellent views as it came out onto the grass to feed. Over the water, an **Osprey** was hunting and a distant **Purple Heron** was seen in flight. Even further away was a hovering **Black-winged Kite**.





Back at the first stop, we managed to get several views of **Little Bittern** and another **Purple Heron**. A **Savi's Warbler** sang from the marsh, but was very hard to find.

We had coffee in a small bar close to the church at Saucedilla, where people were arriving with olive branches for the Palm Sunday mass.

We then drove beyond the village to reach a wonderful area of *dehesa* woodland. Here we had views of a **Wryneck** and a very close **Woodlark**, whilst by the road grew a profusion of **Sawfly Orchids**. Our destination was a shallow lake, surrounded by trees, where we had our packed lunch. There was an excellent selection of duck on the water, including three **Ferruginous Duck**, **Gadwall**, **Teal** and **Tufted Duck**. A **Common Sandpiper** fed along the water's edge.

Peter then received a message that because of air traffic control problems over France, their flight had been cancelled. Luckily we had allowed ourselves plenty of time to head off back to the airport and we arrived at Madrid airport shortly after 15.00 to enable the group to reschedule their return flight to the UK.



## Annotated List

1. **Grey Lag Goose:** Two at Sierra Brava 16<sup>th</sup> March and one at Charco Salado on 20<sup>th</sup>.
2. **Egyptian Goose:** Two at Madrigalejo on 16<sup>th</sup> March and also at Alcollarín.
3. **Wigeon:** Seen at Alcollarin on 19<sup>th</sup> March.
4. **Gadwall:** Seen at Alange, Alcollarín, Arrocampo and Charco Salado.
5. **Teal:** Seen at Alcollarín and Charca Salado.
6. **Mallard:** Seen daily.
7. **Pintail:** Several at Alcollarín on 19<sup>th</sup> March.
8. **Shoveler:** Seen on all large water bodies.
9. **Tufted Duck:** Several at Alcollarín and Charca Salado.
10. **Ferruginous Duck:** One at Alcollarín on 19<sup>th</sup> March and three at Charco Salado on 20<sup>th</sup>.
11. **Shelduck:** 24 at Sierra Brava on 16<sup>th</sup> March and two at Alcollarín on 19<sup>th</sup>.
12. **Ruddy Shelduck:** One at Alcollarín on 19<sup>th</sup> March.
13. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on plains and at Alcollarín.
14. **Quail:** One calling at Alcollarín on 19<sup>th</sup> March.
15. **Little Grebe:** Seen almost daily.
16. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen on all large water bodies.
17. **Black-necked Grebe:** Four at Alcollarín on 19<sup>th</sup> March.
18. **Great Cormorant:** Seen almost daily. Over a hundred seen at Monfragüe.
19. **Little Bittern:** About three seen at Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
20. **Squacco Heron:** One at Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
21. **Cattle Egret:** Seen almost daily.
22. **Little Egret:** Seen almost daily.
23. **Great Egret:** Seen most days.
24. **Grey Heron:** Seen daily.
25. **Purple Heron:** Two seen at Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
26. **Black Stork:** One seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15<sup>th</sup> March, several in Monfragüe on 17<sup>th</sup> and two near Jaraicejo on 19<sup>th</sup>.
27. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
28. **Glossy Ibis:** Three from Roman Bridge, Mérida 18<sup>th</sup> March.
29. **Spoonbill:** Five at Moheda Alta on 16<sup>th</sup> March, one at Alcollarín and also seen at Arrocampo and Charco Salado.
30. **Black-winged Kite:** One at Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
31. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
32. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
33. **Osprey:** One at Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
34. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca, in Monfragüe and at Alange.
35. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
36. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
37. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen almost daily.

38. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost daily.
39. **Hen Harrier**: Two seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
40. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen on two occasions.
41. **Common Buzzard**: Seen almost daily.
42. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15<sup>th</sup> March and also seen in Monfragüe National Park.
43. **Golden Eagle**: One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
44. **Bonelli's Eagle**: Two sightings in Monfragüe National Park on 17<sup>th</sup> March.
45. **Lesser Kestrel**: Seen almost daily.
46. **Common Kestrel**: Seen almost daily.
47. **Peregrine Falcon**: Seen at Moheda Alta, Monfragüe and Alcollarín.
48. **Water Rail**: Recorded at Madrigalejo and Arrocampo.
49. **Moorhen**: Seen on several days.
50. **Purple Swamphen**: Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
51. **Common Coot**: Seen on large water bodies.
52. **Little Bustard**: One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
53. **Great Bustard**: 25 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15<sup>th</sup> March and also seen near Campo Lugar.
54. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on several days with over 70 at Moheda Alta on 16<sup>th</sup> March.
55. **Stone Curlew**: Two pairs near Campo Lugar on 16<sup>th</sup> March and two near Palazuelo on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
56. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen near Madrigalejo and Mérida.
57. **Golden Plover**: Large numbers on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15<sup>th</sup> March and Campo Lugar on 16<sup>th</sup>.
58. **Northern Lapwing**: Small numbers on the plains and two at Charco Salado on 20<sup>th</sup>.
59. **Dunlin**: One at Moheda Alta on 16<sup>th</sup> March.
60. **Ruff**: About six present at Moheda Alta on 16<sup>th</sup> March.
61. **Common Snipe**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
62. **Common Redshank**: About six present at Moheda Alta on 16<sup>th</sup> March.
63. **Spotted Redshank**: About six present at Moheda Alta on 16<sup>th</sup> March.
64. **Greenshank**: Seen on pool on plains on 15<sup>th</sup> March and at Charco Salado.
65. **Green Sandpiper**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
66. **Common Sandpiper**: One at Charco Salado on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
67. **Gull-billed Tern**: One at Alange on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
68. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen almost daily.
69. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen almost daily.
70. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Two seen on plains on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
71. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: About 20 seen on plains on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
72. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon**: Seen almost daily.
73. **Wood Pigeon**: Seen daily.
74. **Collared Dove**: Seen daily.

75. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: Seen en route from Madrid, south of Zorita and near Arrocampo.
76. **Common Cuckoo**: Heard on several days.
77. **Eagle Owl**: One on plains on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
78. **Little Owl**: Two on plains on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
79. **Alpine Swift**: Large numbers at Alange Dam on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
80. **Pallid Swift**: Seen in Trujillo.
81. **Kingfisher**: Seen on two days.
82. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
83. **Wryneck**: One at Charco Salado on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
84. **Iberian Green Woodpecker**: Calling at Pago de San Clemente on 20<sup>th</sup> March and at Madrid airport.
85. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Heard at Monfragüe.
86. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Drumming at Pago de San Clemente on 19<sup>th</sup> March.
87. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains.
88. **Crested Lark**: Seen daily.
89. **Thekla Lark**: Seen almost daily.
90. **Woodlark**: Seen on several days.
91. **Sand Martin**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
92. **Crag Martin**: Seen most days.
93. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
94. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Seen on two days.
95. **House Martin**: Seen daily.
96. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen almost daily.
97. **Water Pipit**: Seen on rice fields.
98. **Yellow Wagtail**: Male of Iberian race seen near Palazuelo on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
99. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen beside River Almonte on 19<sup>th</sup> March.
100. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
101. **Robin**: Seen almost every day.
102. **Bluethroat**: Male at Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
103. **Black Redstart**: Seen on several days.
104. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily.
105. **Northern Wheatear**: One on plains on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
106. **Black Wheatear**: Two at Alange on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
107. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Monfragüe, Alange and beside River Almonte.
108. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
109. **Song Thrush**: Seen on three days.
110. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen near Charco Salado.
111. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded almost every day.
112. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen daily.
113. **Savi's Warbler**: Singing at Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> March.



114. **Sedge Warbler:** Several singing at Arrocampo on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
115. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 19<sup>th</sup> March.
116. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Monfragüe on 17<sup>th</sup> March.
117. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen daily.
118. **Blackcap:** Seen daily.
119. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** One at Alange on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
120. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen daily.
121. **Firecrest:** One at Monfragüe on 17<sup>th</sup> March.
122. **Wren:** Seen most days.
123. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
124. **Crested Tit:** Recorded at Jaraicejo.
125. **Blue Tit:** Seen daily.
126. **Great Tit:** Seen daily
127. **Nuthatch:** Calling at Jaraicejo.
128. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded on several days with sightings at Jaraicejo.
129. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Mérida on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
130. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
131. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
132. **Jay:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
133. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
134. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
135. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
136. **Raven:** Seen almost every day.
137. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
138. **House Sparrow:** seen daily.
139. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
140. **Red Avadavat:** seen on rice fields on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
141. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
142. **Serin:** Seen daily.
143. **Greenfinch:** Seen on several days.
144. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
145. **Siskin:** Party seen in Mérida on 18<sup>th</sup> March.
146. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
147. **Hawfinch:** Seen in Monfragüe and Alcollarín.
148. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
149. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

## **Other wildlife**

### **Butterflies**

Painted Lady (15<sup>th</sup> March)

Swallowtail (16<sup>th</sup> march)

Clouded Yellow (16<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> March)

Small heath 16<sup>th</sup> March)

Small White /16<sup>th</sup> March)

Cleopatra (17<sup>th</sup> March)

Large Tortoiseshell (17<sup>th</sup> March)

Western Dappled White (17<sup>th</sup> March)

### **Orchids**

Sawfly (16<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> March)

Pink Butterfly (16<sup>th</sup> march)

### **Other plants**

Barbary Nut Iris

Yellow Anemone

Star of Bethlehem

Angel's Tears Narcissus

Hoop Petticoat Narcissus

Spanish Milk Vetch

Yellow Star of Bethlehem

### **Mammals**

Otter (17<sup>th</sup> March)