

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR FRANK, KAREN, JOYCE AND TONY

Casa Rural El Recuerdo & Birding Extremadura

Itinerary

16th April 2016: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

17th April 2016: Monfragüe National Park

18th April 2016: Exploring the plains west of Trujillo

19th April 2016: Sierra Brava Reservoir, rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and rice fields near Palazuelo.

20th April 2016: Sierra Brava Reservoir, Campo Lugar plains, Alcollarín Reservoir and pool near Villamesias.

21st April 2016: Alange, Sierra de Utrera, Guadiana River, Mérida and Trujillo

22nd April 2016: Jaraicejo heath and Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid



TOUR REPORT

10th April 2016: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Frank and the group arrived on time and met Martin just after 13.00 as planned. It was raining as we left Madrid airport to take the ring road and then the motorway leaving Madrid and heading south-westwards.

For most of the journey it was raining hard, but at our coffee stop halfway there was a respite and we could enjoy watching the **Barn Swallows** nesting in the porch, as well as a **Crested Lark** with **House Sparrows** in the forecourt. During the onward journey we saw many **White Storks**, as well as some **Black Kites**.

We reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo late afternoon and had time to settle-in before dinner.

17th April 2016: Monfragüe National Park

The day dawned rather misty, but it quite quickly burned-off leaving a generally sunny day with scattered cloud. Before we set off for the day, we all had excellent views of a female **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** in the garden.

Today we headed north, passing Trujillo and crossing the vast undulating *dehesa* landscape on our way to the Monfragüe National Park. At our first stop opposite the huge cliff face of Peña Falcon, dozens of **Griffon Vultures** were sitting huddled on the cliff face, but as the sun broke through we had the amazing spectacle of many of them opening their wings to warm their plumage in the sunshine. At the viewpoint we saw a **Black Stork** at its nest, **Egyptian** and **Black Vultures** and a **Peregrine**, looking diminutive compared to the vultures. Smaller still was the array of birds like **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart**, as well as **Wrens** which were all present at close quarters.

From there we drove through the park to the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. Here we were immediately rewarded by the sight of a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** perched on a dead branch, preening in the sunshine.



If we thought that this was a great sighting more was yet to come, for whilst we were there, we watched the eagle being mobbed by **Ravens**, mobbing **Griffon Vultures**, collecting nest material and carrying it over to the nest. The viewpoint as well treated us with good observations of **Nightingale** and **Subalpine Warbler**, as well as **Egyptian Vulture** and **Griffon Vulture** chicks on their nests.

We broke off the birding for a coffee break nearby, although the coffee itself was interrupted by watching a **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Sparrowhawk** and others.

We then made our way back though the park, seeing an **Egyptian Vulture** at its nest, **Azure-winged Magpies** at our picnic site, **Short-toed** and **Booted Eagles** and **Alpine Swifts**.

We visited a wonderful geological formation and took in the scenery which was very atmospheric. We then drove out of the park stopping at the Arroyo de la Vid to look at the Pre-Cambrian ripples left on the surface of the quartzite rocks there.

We made a final stop beside the River Almonte, south of Jaraicejo, where we saw our first **Bee-eaters**, a male **Spanish Sparrow** beside a male **House Sparrow** and a beautiful **Woodchat Shrike**.

18th April 2016: Exploring the plains west of Trujillo

It was a day of settled sunny weather and light wind. The visibility was excellent and as we set off we could see the snow-clad Gredos Mountains.

We started the day on the plains west of Trujillo, having the opportunity of watching **Thekla** and **Crested Larks** quite close to each other whilst listening to **Corn Buntings** singing from all directions. We found a male **Little Bustard**, as well as three others in flight. Two **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** flew overhead, their white underparts gleaming in the sunshine.

We drove a short distance to a dirt road. We saw **Iberian Grey Shrike**, and had brief views of a **Tawny Pipit**. **Calandra Larks** were singing and chasing each other around. We found a **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** feeding on the ground, and had excellent views of **Great Bustard**. A **Grey Heron** mobbing a raptor drew our attention: it was an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. We then drove to an area further west, stopping for coffee (where a **Black Vulture** flew over, attracted to a carcass not far away which was drawing the attention of many vultures, kites and Ravens) and returning to the plains we had superb views of **Rollers** beside nestboxes, some of which were being used by other species such as **Lesser Kestrel** and **Jackdaw**. We continued to the Tamuja River where we stopped to admire the magnificent view, seeing a **Short-toed Eagle**.

We then stopped for lunch beside the Magasca River, where we had an extraordinary series of views of birds of prey, starting with **Short-toed Eagle**, then a pair of **Golden Eagles** (one of which mobbed the **Short-toed**), then a pair of **Booted Eagles**, followed by a pair of high-flying **Bonelli's Eagles**, followed by a very close dark-phase of **Booted Eagle**. Thus during the day so far we had seen all five eagle species! A **Cirl Bunting** sang and **Crag Martins** hawked insects.

We rose again to the plains from the valley, admiring **Montagu's Harriers** en route and stopped for at an ancient drovers' trail. This gave us the opportunity to explore the flora and we saw a magnificent **Pink Butterfly Orchid**, as well as **Bug Orchids** and wonderful **Heart-flowered Orchids**. As well as more vultures and **Calandra Larks**, we also saw **Short-toed Lark** were also seen briefly.

A short diversion towards the village of Aldea del Obispo gave us the chance to have further good views of **Tawny Pipit** and **Woodchat Shrike**, as well as **Spanish Sparrow**.

In Trujillo, we stopped at the Bull Ring to watch the comings and goings of **Lesser Kestrels**, as well as several **Spotless Starlings** bring food to nestlings.



19th April 2016: Sierra Brava Reservoir, rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and rice fields near Palazuelo.

It was a cool and overcast start to the day, but it remained dry through to late morning when the rain started. For most of the afternoon it was heavy overcast with lots of rain.

We headed south from Casa Rural El Recuerdo, through the town of Zorita, and made our first stop beside the Sierra Brava Reservoir. On a derelict barn were a few **Lesser Kestrels** and as we proceeded we found two **Great Spotted Cuckoos** in the scrubby pastures south of the reservoir. We also had a brief glimpse of a female **Black-eared Wheatear**. On the reservoir itself, the water was choppy but we could make out the shapes of **Great Crested Grebes** and a few **Mallard**.

We then descended to the irrigated rice fields and stopped beside a stony area where we had magnificent views of **Collared Pratincoles**, on the ground as well as in flight. Nearby we had good views of **Red Avadavats** and **Common Waxbills**, whilst in a reed-filled river, the site resounded with the song of **Great Reed** and **Reed Warbler**, **Nightingale** and **Cetti's Warblers**. In some willows a different song was being produced: a **Melodious Warbler**, and we eventually got fine views of it.

After coffee, we drove into an area of rough pasture, stopping by a small gravel pit where a **Great Reed Warbler** was singing right out in the open. The area was very good for **Iberian Grey Shrike**.

We then drove further south and to the *dehesa* area of Moheda Alta. There on a small pool we were pleased to find two drake and a female **Garganey**, fast asleep, it seemed,

or at least huddled against the inclement weather. Into the woodland we stopped at a hide where we too sheltered and had our picnic, watching at the same time **Black-winged Stilts** and **Greenshank** in front of us, as well as **Cetti's Warblers** out in the open.

After lunch as the rain got heavier, we made our way across expanse of rice fields, but the conditions were not very conducive for finding birds, but we did manage a juvenile **Spoonbill** standing on a bund.

20th April 2016: Sierra Brava Reservoir, Campo Lugar plains, Alcollarín Reservoir and pool near Villamesias.

The weather had improved on yesterday and it was only in the afternoon when we encountered a few heavy showers.

We returned to the Sierra Brava Reservoir and were rewarded with an excellent view of a male **Black-eared Wheatear**, as well as some obliging **Hoopoes**.

We then moved onto the Campo Lugar plains where we spent most of the morning. There we had truly superb views of **Great Bustard**, a group of 15 males using the weak sunshine and light breeze to groom-up after the wet night. We enjoyed watching them preening carefully in excellent light and even saw one embark on a series of short bouts of display. All the time a **Calandra Lark** sang beautifully above us. A female **Montagu's Harrier** cruised over the grassland, and perched for a time on a stone near the bustards.

Further along we saw another **Great Bustard**, but here the attraction was a calling **Little Bustard** (with two in flight seen as well), as well as **Rollers** and **Lesser Kestrels**. A **Crested Lark** perched close by for plenty of time to allow us to stay its features well. A few minutes later we had good views of a **Tawny Pipit** as well.



After coffee, we moved on to the Alcollarín Reservoir. Exploring the eastern shore first of all, we saw a good selection of herons: **Great Egret**, **Little Egret**, **Cattle Egret**, **Spoonbill**, **Grey Heron** and **Purple Heron**. **Gull-billed Terns** passed by and there were a few duck which included **Mallard**, **Wigeon**, **Gadwall**, **Pintail** and **Shelduck**. A superb **Iberian Grey Shrike** perched on a tree in front of us. We had lunch beside a small pool where **White Storks** were nesting and both **Great Crested** and **Little Grebes** were present. Fledge **Barn Swallows** were perched on a dead tree awaiting to be fed, and a **Sand Martin** sat alongside them. Nearby a male **Spanish Sparrow** was advertising its nest. We also came across a **Long-eared Owl**.

A heavy shower of rain started and we crossed the dam and paused beside the *dehesa* woodland. As the rain eased, bird activity picked-up. A **Western Bonelli's Warbler** started to sing and we eventually got great views of it. Two migrant **Spotted Flycatchers** were also present in the area. We heard **Golden Orioles**, but only got brief glimpses of two males in flight.

We stopped by the shore and walked to a good vantage point. Up to 45 **Black Terns** and a few **Whiskered Terns** hawked insects over the water and we found a few **Black-necked Grebes** as well. Searching through a flotilla of **Common Coot**, we managed to find a single **Red-knobbed Coot** amongst them, a rarity in Extremadura.

Leaving Alcollarín we made a brief visit to a small reservoir near Villamesias, where there were a few **Common Pochard**, **Common Coot** and **Mallard**, but the highlight here was three **Rock Sparrows**.

21st April 2016: Alange, Sierra de Utrera, Guadiana River, Mérida and Trujillo

It was a generally sunny day with overcast periods and a light breeze.

We headed south-west, crossing the *dehesas* south of Trujillo and then after Miajadas entering an area of intensive arable land. We then returned to more woodland and rocky landscapes to arrive at the massive dam wall of Alange. Here we parked and took a walk beside the reservoir, with a rocky outcrop with old olive groves to one side. One of the first birds we saw was a close **Gull-billed Tern**. We heard a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** singing in an almond tree and with patience managed to see it, noting that a **Willow Warbler** was feeding in the same tree and sometimes they were in the same field of view. A nice comparison of two passage warblers. A **Blue Rock Thrush** was also seen. Eventually we saw what we had been hoping for, a pair of **Black Wheatear** which obliging perched together beside the path. We were to see another on our return to the car park. Just before reaching the vehicle we found a **Common Tern** perched on a rock beside the water, a rarity here in Extremadura. At the dam, we had superb views of **Alpine Swifts** coming to their breeding sites.

After coffee where we were entertained by a colony of House Martins, we viewed another rocky outcrop and had a good, albeit distant view of an adult **Eagle Owl**.

We then visited the Sierra de Utrera where four species of orchids were growing right next to the track. It was a very beautiful area with the lavender in bloom and we watched a **Short-toed Eagle** hovering over the ridge.



We had lunch beside the River Guadiana in an area of mixed woodland, full of the song of **Nightingales** and **Cetti's Warbler**, where we also saw **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** and **Garden Warbler**.

We had an excellent afternoon of birdwatching from the Roman Bridge spanning the Guadiana in the centre of Mérida. The longest Roman bridge in the world was an experience in itself to be walking on, but from it we had brilliant views of a **Purple Heron** at one end, and **Penduline Tits** at the other. Added to that we saw **Purple Swamphen**, **Glossy Ibis** and **Black-crowned Night Heron**.

We completed a very enjoyable afternoon with drinks and shopping in the Main Square of Trujillo.

22nd April 2016: Jaraicejo heath and Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid

It was a damp and misty start of the day. We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and set off in the direction of Madrid. By the time of our first stop, just twenty minutes into the journey, the weather was starting to improve. Our first bird was a fine **Black Stork** which flew up from an inundated corner of the heath that we would be exploring. We stopped along the track with **Thekla Larks** and **Corn Buntings** singing and soon we heard the song of **Spectacled Warbler**. Joyce spotted the bird, perched on a cable and we had prolonged and excellent views of it. We also saw several **Dartford Warblers**.

We then stopped in an area of open cork oak woodland where after some effort we managed to see a singing **Western Orphean Warbler**. Our next stop for **Woodlark** proved much easier: as soon as we were out of the vehicle we found a bird singing on top of a telegraph pole. A **Crested Tit** was calling from an evergreen and showed itself briefly.

We then descended from the Miravete Pass and stopped beside the marsh of the Arrocampo Reservoir. Here we had a very successful visit with excellent views of **Little Bittern** and **Purple Swamphen**, as well as sightings of **Savi's Warbler** and **Bearded Tit**. **Purple Heron** was also seen.

We drove in an area to the west of Saucedilla and found a **Black-winged Kite** perched on a holm oak and had superb views of **Bee-eaters** perched on a fence close to the road.

Sadly, it was then time to head to Madrid and we made the journey as planned, reaching Terminal One at 15.00 on the dot.

Annotated List

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
2. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarin.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen near Madrigalejo, at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
4. **Mallard**: Seen almost daily.
5. **Pintail**: Seen at Alcollarin.

6. **Garganey:** Two drakes and a female at Moheda Alta on 19th April.
7. **Shoveler:** Seen at Alcollarín.
8. **Common Pochard:** Seen at Alcollarín and Villamesias.
9. **Shelduck:** Three at Alcollarín on 20th April.
10. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on several days.
11. **Quail:** Heard on the plains.
12. **Little Grebe:** Seen almost daily.
13. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen on all large water bodies.
14. **Black-necked Grebe:** At least six seen at Alcollarin.
15. **Great Cormorant:** Seen almost daily.
16. **Little Bittern:** Three at Arrocampo on 22nd April.
17. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Two at Mérida on 21st April and one at Arrocampo on 22nd.
18. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on several days.
19. **Little Egret:** Seen on several days.
20. **Great Egret:** Seen at Moheda Alta, at Alcollarín and Villamesias.
21. **Grey Heron:** Seen daily.
22. **Purple Heron:** One immature bird at Alcollarín, and seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
23. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe and one at Jaraicejo on 22nd April.
24. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
25. **Glossy Ibis:** About four seen at Mérida on 21st April.
26. **Spoonbill:** A colour-ringed juvenile near Palazuelo on 19th April, 12 at Alcollarín and one at Villamesias on 20th.
27. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen in Monfragüe and one near Arrocampo.
28. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
29. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
30. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Two seen in Monfragüe National Park on 17th April and one on plains on 18th.
31. **Golden Eagle:** Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 18th April.
32. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen on almost daily.
33. **Booted Eagle:** Seen on two days.
34. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 18th April.
35. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
36. **Red Kite:** Seen on three days.
37. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen near Sierra Brava reservoir and on rice fields.
38. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen on several days.
39. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
40. **Sparrowhawk:** One seen at Monfragüe on 17th April.
41. **Black-winged Kite:** One near Saucedilla on 22nd April.
42. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
43. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on several days.
44. **Peregrine:** Seen at Monfragüe on 17th April.

45. **Water Rail:** Recorded at Ruercas River on 19th April.
46. **Moorhen:** Seen on three days.
47. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
48. **Common Coot:** Seen on large water bodies.
49. **Red-knobbed Coot:** One amongst Common Coot at Alcollarín on 20th April.
50. **Little Bustard:** Four near Santa Marta de Magasca on 18th April and three near Campo Lugar on 20th.
51. **Great Bustard:** Several near Santa Marta de Magasca on 18th April, one near Sierra Brava on 19th and at least 20 on Campo Lugar on 20th.
52. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on several days with six at Moheda Alta on 19th April.
53. **Stone Curlew:** Two seen flying on our journey from Madrid on 16th April.
54. **Collared Pratincole:** About ten near Fernando V on 19th April.
55. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on Magasca River on 18th April and at Moheda Alta on 19th.
56. **Northern Lapwing:** One at Arrocampo on 22nd April.
57. **Greenshank:** Seen at Alcollarín and at Moheda Alta.
58. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Monfragüe, Alange and Arrocampo.
59. **Whiskered Tern:** Three at Alcollarín on 20th April.
60. **Black Tern:** 45 at Alcollarín on 20th April.
61. **Common Tern:** One at Alange on 21st April.
62. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen on rice fields, Alcollarín and Alange.
63. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on rice fields and large reservoirs.
64. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 18th April and heard at Campo Lugar on 20th.
65. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 18th April.
66. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
67. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen on several days.
68. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
69. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Two seen near Sierra Brava on 19th April.
70. **Common Cuckoo:** Recorded almost daily.
71. **Scops Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente 18th April.
72. **Eagle Owl:** One at Alange on 21st April.
73. **Little Owl:** Seen or heard most days.
74. **Long-eared Owl:** One at Alcollarín on 20th April.
75. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
76. **Common Swift:** Seen daily.
77. **Pallid Swift:** Seen on two days.
78. **Kingfisher:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
79. **Bee-eater:** Seen almost daily.
80. **Roller:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 18th April and near Campo Lugar.
81. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.

82. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: One at Pago de San Clemente on 17th April and two near Mérida on 21st.
83. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains.
84. **Short-toed Lark**: Seen on plains on 18th April.
85. **Crested Lark**: Seen daily.
86. **Thekla Lark**: Seen almost daily.
87. **Woodlark**: Seen at Miravete pass on 22nd April.
88. **Sand Martin**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
89. **Crag Martin**: Seen most days.
90. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
91. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Seen daily.
92. **House Martin**: Seen daily.
93. **Tawny Pipit**: Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 18th April, one near Campo Lugar on 20th and one on 21st.
94. **Grey Wagtail**: One seen on 18th April.
95. **White Wagtail**: Seen almost daily.
96. **Wren**: Seen in Monfragüe.
97. **Robin**: Singing in Monfragüe.
98. **Nightingale**: Heard singing daily and seen several times.
99. **Black Redstart**: Seen in Monfragüe.
100. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily with broods of fledglings seen.
101. **Black-eared Wheatear**: Seen at Sierra Brava on 19th and 20th April.
102. **Black Wheatear**: Three at Alange on 21st April.
103. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
104. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
105. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on two days.
106. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded almost every day.
107. **Zitting Cisticola**: Recorded almost daily.
108. **Savi's Warbler**: Singing at Arrocampo.
109. **Sedge Warbler**: One singing at Arrocampo.
110. **Reed Warbler**: Singing at Rio Ruercas, Mérida and Arrocampo.
111. **Great Reed Warbler**: Singing at Rio Ruercas and near Madrigalejo on 19th April.
112. **Melodious Warbler**: One near Rio Ruercas on 19th April.
113. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
114. **Spectacled Warbler**: Seen at Jaraicejo on 22nd April.
115. **Subalpine Warbler**: Seen at Monfragüe.
116. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen on several days.
117. **Western Orphean Warbler**: Heard in Monfragüe and seen near Jaraicejo.
118. **Garden Warbler**: One near Mérida on 21st April.
119. **Blackcap**: Recorded on two days.
120. **Western Bonelli's Warbler**: Seen at Alcollarín on 20th April, Alange on 21st and Jaraicejo on 22nd.

121. **Willow Warbler:** Seen at Alange on 21st April.
122. **Spotted Flycatcher:** Two seen at Alcollarín on 20th April
123. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at Alcollarín and near Mérida.
124. **Crested Tit:** Seen at Miravete Pass on 22nd April.
125. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
126. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
127. **Bearded Tit:** One male at Arrocampo on 22nd April.
128. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded at Monfragüe.
129. **Penduline Tit:** Seen in Mérida on 21st April.
130. **Golden Oriole:** Two males at Alcollarín on 20th April.
131. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen on several days.
132. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
133. **Jay:** Seen at Miravete Pass.
134. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
135. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
136. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
137. **Raven:** Seen almost every day.
138. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
139. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
140. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on almost every days.
141. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
142. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen near Villamesias on 20th April.
143. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
144. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
145. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
146. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
147. **Greenfinch:** Seen almost daily.
148. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
149. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
150. **Cirl Bunting:** Singing at River Magasca on 18th April and at Miravete Pass on 22nd.
151. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
152. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Orchids

1. **Champagne Orchid:** Sierra de Utrera 21st April
2. **Green-winged Orchid:** Sierra de Utrera 21st April
3. **Pink Butterfly Orchid:** North of Trujillo 18th April
4. **Heart-flowered Serapias:** North of Trujillo 18th April
5. **Tongue Orchid:** Moheda Alta 19th April
6. **Perez-chiscanoi Tongue Orchid:** Sierra de Utrera 21st April