

**HOLIDAY REPORT FOR PAUL AND ANNE**  
**Casa Rural El Recuerdo & Birding Extremadura**  
**“Orchids and birds in early spring”**

**Itinerary**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2016:** Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo
- 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016:** Valverde de Mérida, Sierra de Utrera and Búrdalo Reservoir
- 5<sup>th</sup> April 2016:** Exploring the plains west of Trujillo
- 6<sup>th</sup> April 2016:** Valverde de Mérida, Sierra de Utrera and Alange
- 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016:** Jaraicejo and Monfragüe
- 8<sup>th</sup> April 2016:** Arrocampo Reservoir, Charco Salado and Cerro Almaráz.
- 9<sup>th</sup> April 2016:** Ricefields near Madrigalejo and Alcollarín Reservoir
- 10<sup>th</sup> April 2016:** Return to Madrid



## TOUR REPORT

### 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2016: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Paul and Ann arrived on time at terminal 4 of Madrid Airport and we set off shortly after 16.00 on our way to Extremadura. The traffic was light and in less than an hour we were on the motorway heading southwest from the city. We stopped about halfway in the journey for a coffee, and watched **Crested Larks** in the service station forecourt. On the rest of the journey we had sightings of **White Stork**, two **Great Spotted Cuckoos**, **Cattle Egrets** and **Black Kites**. We arrived just after 19.00 at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with the evening meal ready for us to enjoy.

### 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016: Valverde de Mérida, Sierra de Utrera and Búrdalo Reservoir

As forecast, the day started with heavy rain and it remained wet and sometimes windy throughout the whole day, just easing a little bit by the end of the afternoon. Despite the poor weather conditions, we had a quite productive day. We stopped first at some gravel pits near Valverde de Mérida where we watched the **Barn Swallows** hawking insects close to the water surface. There were **Black-winged Stilts**, **Green** and **Common Sandpipers** and **Little Ringed Plover** present, as well as several fine **Yellow Wagtails**.

We then went to the town of Alange for coffee and then visited the Sierra de Utrera. The rain was heavy and we were forced to have our picnic in the car, but brief excursions enabled us to see several interesting plants such as **Lusitanian Fritillary**, **Green-winged** and **Champagne Orchids** and **Tongue Orchids**.

We then made a brief return visit to the gravel pits, watching a **Marsh Harrier** hunting and some rather bedraggled **Spanish Sparrows**. We dropped into the Burdalo Reservoir, where a pair of **Garganey** and two **Spoonbill** were present as well as a nice diversity of other duck, including **Pintail** and **Pochard**.

### 5<sup>th</sup> April 2016: Exploring the plains west of Trujillo

In complete contrast to yesterday, the day dawned clear and it was sunny all day and when the light but fresh breeze abated, also very pleasantly warm.

We started the day on the plains west of Trujillo, watching a displaying **Little Bustard**, as well as close views of **Thekla Larks**. Within minutes at our next stop we were mesmerised by the magnificent sight of a displaying **Great Bustard**, which also drew the attention of two female **Great Bustards**. The light was perfect, the pasture full of wild flowers and the distant mountains forming the backdrop to this scene, peaked with snow...what more could we ask for!



Great Bustard

As we watched, **Calandra Larks** sang their song accompanied us, and indeed did so for much of the day. We drove a short distance down a dirt road, where we saw **Tawny Pipits** and some fine **Red Kites**. We then drove to an area further west where we had superb views of **Montagu's Harriers** with the appearance of two juvenile and an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** as we stood there. After coffee in the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we stopped beside the Magasca River. Here **Cirl Bunting** sang and **Crag Martins**, **Red-rumped Swallows** hawked insects. Whilst we were there a **Golden Eagle** appeared and graced us with quite a prolonged view. A **Black Stork** also flew over.

We rose again to the plains from the valley and stopped for a picnic along an ancient drovers' trail. This gave us the opportunity to explore the flora and we were rewarded with some fine **Bug Orchids**, **Mirror Orchids** and a **Sawfly Orchid**. A **Little Bustard** flew over whilst we pottered around and at our feet we also saw several **Red-striped Oil Beetles**.

Further along the same trail, we saw a magnificent **Pink Butterfly Orchid**, as well as more **Bug Orchids** and several **Heart-flowered Orchids**. An **Iberian Hare** and a **Short-toed Lark** were also seen.



Pink Butterfly Orchid

We drove towards Trujillo slowly, getting great views of **Woodchat Shrikes**, **Northern Wheatear**, as well as briefer views of **Spanish Sparrow** and an **Eagle Owl**.

At Trujillo we stopped for short while beside the Bull Ring ring to watch the colony of **Lesser Kestrels**.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> April 2016: Valverde de Mérida, Sierra de Utrera and Alange**

It was a warm and sunny day and we drove south, making a stop first of all near Valverde de Mérida where we spent an hour viewing the small pool, but in vain for an appearance of the Baillon's Crake. However, we did see **Bee-eaters**, a **Water Pipit**, **Sedge Warbler**, as well as the supporting cast of **Black-winged Stilt**, **Snipe** and **Common Sandpiper**. After coffee in Alange we returned to the hidden valley in the Sierra de Utrera, where we spent a very happy couple of hours in the spectacular scenery and flora of this area. Four species of orchid (**Champagne**, **Green-winged**, **Heart-flowered** and **Tongue**) as well as birds including **Woodchat Shrike** and **Greater Whitethroat**.



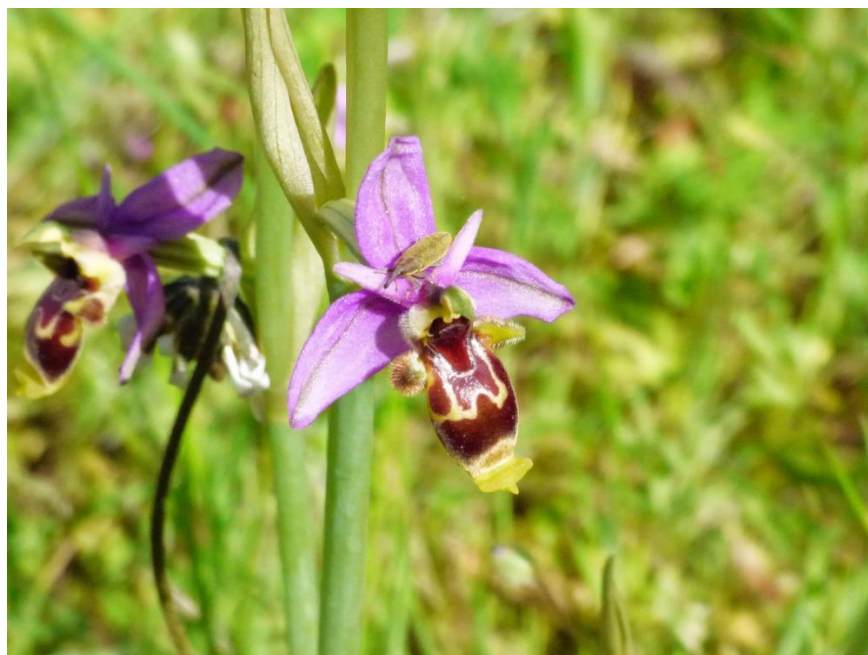


The Hidden Valley

Following lunch there we returned to Alange and had an excellent walk close to the castle where we found a further six species of orchid including the very rare **Bumblebee Orchid**, as well as **Yellow Bee**, **Woodcock**, **Pink Butterfly**, **Sawfly** and **Early Spider**.



Bumblebee Orchid



Woodcock Orchid

### 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016: Jaraicejo and Monfragüe

It was a fine and sunny day and we started the day on the heathlands near the village of Jaraicejo. Here we enjoyed a walk across the lavender and white broom-dominated landscape, before descending into a beautiful cork oak woodland. On the heath, **Corn Buntings** and **Thekla Larks** sang and on our return, we watched **Dartford Warblers** in song flights as well. In the woodland, we watched a delightful **Subalpine Warbler**, singing from a tree and also doing song flights, whilst **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** were drumming. We had several flight views of this diminutive bird. At our feet we found several fine specimens of **Angel's Tears Narcissus** as well as basal leaves of **Dense-flowered Orchid**.

We then made a visit to the Arroyo de la Vid, where **Red-rumped Swallows** were nesting under the bridge. Following coffee, we drove to the Monfragüe National Park. Our first stop, at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint, gave us the chance to look across onto the huge and impressive Peña Falcon, home of a large **Griffon Vulture** colony. We also watched **Black Storks** carrying out a changeover at their nest, as well as smaller birds like **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart**.





Nettle tree Butterfly

**Nettle Tree butterflies** were easily seen on the bare Nettle Trees in the lay-by. From there we stopped at the Fuente de Francés, where we had a picnic beside the beautiful mixed woodland on the northward facing slope of the ridge: the finest tract of natural Mediterranean woodland in Spain.



Monfragüe view

Our next stop was the Portilla del Tiétar, where we saw a nest changeover by a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, as well as again **Griffon Vultures** and **Egyptian Vultures**. On the wayside grew **Hoop Petticoat Narcissus** and a fine **Wild Peony**.

Retracing our steps through the park we saw a female **Black-eared Wheatear** in the cistus scrub and **Black Vultures** gliding overhead.

#### **8<sup>th</sup> April 2016: Arrocampo Reservoir, Charco Salado and Cerro Almaráz.**

The fine weather continued and we headed north-east to stop at the Arrocampo Reservoir. As we passed through Almaráz we made a stop beside a meadow to see the first flowering spikes of **Lax-flowered Orchid**. We spent a very enjoyable time at our first stop, a hide overlooking an area of marsh where we saw two **Spoonbill**, several **Purple Herons**, a couple of **Great Egrets**, as well as **Zitting Cisticola**. We then visited another hide, where we managed to get views of a singing **Savi's Warbler**, as well as more **Purple Herons**. Migrant **Willow Warblers** foraged in the bushes in front of us. Following coffee, we explored the hinterland of the reservoir, mainly farmland, where on a pool we found a group of four **Whimbrel** and a similar number of **Common Redshank**. A little further along we were had great views of a party of foraging **Bee-eaters**. At the end of the marsh, we found a small colony of **Champagne Orchids**.

We then drove through woodland to reach Charco Salado, a beautiful pool set in *dehesa* woodland with the snow-capped Gredos mountains as a backdrop. On the water were many **Common Coot** and a few **Little Grebe** and **Mallard**, but it was the serenity of the place, coupled with the sound of **Cuckoos** calling that made it very special. From there, we returned briefly to the marsh to get sightings of **Purple Swamphen**, and then went up to the Cerro Almaráz. Here we spent the afternoon, watching more **Bee-eaters** as well as **Sardinian Warbler**, but best of all were the orchids, including many fine **Naked Man** and **Conical** as well as a profusion of **Yellow Bee Orchids**, **Mirror Orchids** and fine **Woodcock Orchids**.

#### **9<sup>th</sup> April 2016: Ricefields near Madrigalejo and Alcollarín Reservoir**

Another sunny and dry day, with a slight freshness to the breeze in the morning. We started by exploring an area of rice fields near the town of Madrigalejo, stopping first at some small gravel pits where we were pleased to find a group of five **Garganey** (four drakes and one female), They looked pristine as they fed amidst the floating blanket of **Water Crowsfoot**.





Garganey

Beyond in an area of rough pasture we had excellent views of **Iberian Grey Shrike**, as well as **Marsh Harriers**. But pride of place must go to the group of **Bee-eaters** which sat delightfully on a fence in front of us, making swooping sallies for flying insects. On one occasion one landed with such speed that it swung upside down on the wire and remained there for a second or two, somewhat bemused by its landing!

On the rice stubbles there was a small flock of **Yellow Wagtails**, the sun catching their bright underparts beautifully. A female **Black-eared Wheatear** and a **Purple Heron** were also seen. We then crossed another area of rice fields near the village of Palazuelo. Almost all of these fields were dry, but we did find a **Wood Sandpiper** and a party of eight **Common Redshank**. **Bee-eaters** were also common here, as were **Hoopoes**, and few **Collared Pratincoles** were seen flying overhead. **Northern Wheatear** were passing through on passage.

After coffee, where the **House Martin** colony on a nearby old silo building provided us with a superb spectacle, akin to bees at a hive. We then went to the reservoir of Alcollarín. The granite landscape was a real sight with the spring flowers. On the reservoir itself were a few **Spoonbill**, many **Black-headed Gulls**, **Great** and **Little Egret**, and a range of duck including **Common Shelduck**, **Egyptian Goose**, **Wigeon** and **Gadwall**. Both **Woodchat** and **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were seen, and we were lucky enough to see a **Long-eared Owl**.

After a picnic lunch, watching **Spanish Sparrows**, we returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, following a scenic route where the flowers, especially the **French Lavender** and **Purple Sea Spurrey** were simply magnificent.

An afternoon walk from the house rewarded Paul and Anne with a fine **Short-toed Eagle**, as well as good views of **Azure-winged Magpies**.

### **10<sup>th</sup> April 2016: Return to Madrid**

For our return to Madrid the weather had changes and it was overcast with some periods of light drizzle. We left Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 08.15 and with a stop for coffee halfway, we reached the airport in good time at 11.15. The highlight was an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** flying low across the motorway shortly after we resumed the journey after the break

### **Annotated List**

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
2. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín and Búrdalo.
4. **Teal**: Seen at Búrdalo.
5. **Mallard**: Seen almost daily.
6. **Pintail**: Several at Búrdalo.
7. **Garganey**: A pair at Búrdalo on 4<sup>th</sup> April and five near Madrigalejo on 9<sup>th</sup>.
8. **Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín and Búrdalo.
9. **Common Pochard**: Seen at Búrdalo and Charco Salado.
10. **Shelduck**: Two at Alcollarín on 9<sup>th</sup> April.
11. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on several days.
12. **Little Grebe**: Seen almost daily.
13. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen on all large water bodies.
14. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost daily.
15. **Cattle Egret**: Seen almost daily.
16. **Little Egret**: Seen almost daily.
17. **Great Egret**: Seen most days.
18. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
19. **Purple Heron**: Seen at Arrocampo, Valverde de Mérida and Casas del Hito.
20. **Black Stork**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca, Jaraicejo and Monfragüe.
21. **White Stork**: Seen daily.
22. **Spoonbill**: Two seen at seen at Arrocampo on 8<sup>th</sup> April, one near Madrigalejo on 9<sup>th</sup> and 12 at Alcollarín.
23. **Black Kite**: Seen daily.
24. **Red Kite**: Seen almost daily.
25. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen in Monfragüe.
26. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
27. **Black Vulture**: Seen on plains and at Monfragüe

28. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen on two days.
29. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen at Arrocampo and on rice fields.
30. **Montagu's Harrier:** Four near Santa Marta de Magasca on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
31. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
32. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Three seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 5<sup>th</sup> April and two seen in Monfragüe National Park. One on return to Madrid on 10<sup>th</sup> April.
33. **Golden Eagle:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 5<sup>th</sup> April
34. **Booted Eagle:** Seen on 9<sup>th</sup> April at Alcollarín.
35. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
36. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
37. **Water Rail:** Recorded at Arrocampo.
38. **Moorhen:** Seen on several days.
39. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
40. **Common Coot:** Seen on large water bodies.
41. **Little Bustard:** Two Santa Marta de Magasca on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
42. **Great Bustard:** Displaying male with accompanying females Santa Marta de Magasca on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
43. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on several.
44. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Valverde de Mérida and rice fields.
45. **Common Snipe:** Seen at Valverde de Mérida.
46. **Whimbrel:** Four at Arrocampo on 8<sup>th</sup> April.
47. **Common Redshank:** Four at Arrocampo on 8<sup>th</sup> April and eight near Palazuelo on 9<sup>th</sup>.
48. **Greenshank:** Seen at Burdalo.
49. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on at Valverde de Mérida, the rice fields and Arrocampo.
50. **Wood Sandpiper:** One near Palazuelo on 9<sup>th</sup> April.
51. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Valverde de Mérida.
52. **Collared Pratincole:** Three near Palazuelo on 9<sup>th</sup> April.
53. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Alcollarín in large numbers.
54. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
55. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
56. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
57. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Two seen on way from Madrid.
58. **Common Cuckoo:** Recorded almost daily.
59. **Eagle Owl:** One on plains on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
60. **Long-eared Owl:** One at Alcollarín on 9<sup>th</sup> April.
61. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange.
62. **Common Swift:** Seen at Alange.
63. **Pallid Swift:** Seen at Alange and Trujillo.
64. **Kingfisher:** Recorded at Arrocampo.
65. **Bee-eater:** Seen almost daily, especially towards the end of the holiday.
66. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.



67. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Two seen at Jaraicejo on 7<sup>th</sup> April.
68. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
69. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen on plains.
70. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
71. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
72. **Woodlark:** Excellent views near Aldea del Obispo on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
73. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
74. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
75. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
76. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
77. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
78. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen at Valverde de Mérida.
79. **Water Pipit:** Seen at Valverde de Mérida.
80. **Tawny Pipit:** Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
81. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen at Monfragüe.
82. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
83. **Yellow wagtail:** Seen at Valverde de Mérida and on rice fields.
84. **Robin:** Seen in Monfragüe.
85. **Nightingale:** Heard singing most days.
86. **Black Redstart:** Seen in Monfragüe.
87. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
88. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen in Monfragüe and Casas del Hitos.
89. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen on plains and on rice fields.
90. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
91. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
92. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen on two days.
93. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded almost every day.
94. **Zitting Cisticola:** Recorded almost daily.
95. **Savi's Warbler:** Singing at Arrocampo.
96. **Sedge Warbler:** Seen at Valverde de Mérida.
97. **Reed Warbler:** Singing at Arrocampo.
98. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 7<sup>th</sup> April.
99. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo and Monfragüe.
100. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen most days.
101. **Blackcap:** Seen most days.
102. **Greater Whitehroat:** One singing at Sierra de Utrera 6<sup>th</sup> April.
103. **Common Chiffchaff:** Singing at Alange.
104. **Willow Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo.
105. **Wren:** Seen most days.
106. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
107. **Blue Tit:** Seen daily.
108. **Great Tit:** Seen daily
109. **Nuthatch:** Calling at Jaraicejo.

110. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded at Jaraicejo.
111. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen on rice fields.
112. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
113. **Jay:** Heard at Jaraicejo.
114. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
115. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
116. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
117. **Raven:** Seen almost every day.
118. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
119. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
120. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on several days.
121. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
122. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Charco Salado on 8<sup>th</sup> April.
123. **Red Avadavat:** seen on rice fields.
124. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
125. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
126. **Greenfinch:** Singing at Alcollarín.
127. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
128. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
129. **Cirl Bunting:** Singing at River Magasca on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
130. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe.
131. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

## Orchids

1. **Giant Orchid:** Alange 6<sup>th</sup> April
2. **Bumblebee Orchid:** Alange 6<sup>th</sup> April
3. **Early Spider Orchid:** Alange 6<sup>th</sup> April
4. **Yellow Bee Orchid:** Alange 6<sup>th</sup> April and Cerro Almaráz 8<sup>th</sup> April
5. **Woodcock Orchid:** Alange 6<sup>th</sup> April and Cerro Almaráz 8<sup>th</sup> April
6. **Mirror Orchid:** North of Trujillo 5<sup>th</sup> April, Alange 6<sup>th</sup> April and Cerro Almaráz 8<sup>th</sup> April
7. **Sawfly Orchid:** Widespread
8. **Bug Orchid:** North of Trujillo 5<sup>th</sup> April
9. **Conical Orchid:** Cerro Almaráz 8<sup>th</sup> April
10. **Champagne Orchid:** Widespread
11. **Green-winged Orchid:** Utrera 6<sup>th</sup> April
12. **Lax-flowered Orchid:** Almaráz 8<sup>th</sup> April
13. **Naked Man Orchid:** Cerro Almaráz 8<sup>th</sup> April
14. **Pink Butterfly Orchid:** Widespread
15. **Dense-flowered Orchid:** Jaraicejo (not in flower)
16. **Heart-flowered Serapias:** North of Trujillo 5<sup>th</sup> April, Utrera 6<sup>th</sup> April
17. **Tongue Orchid:** Utrera 6<sup>th</sup> April