

## HOLIDAY REPORT FOR TONY AND TRIS

19<sup>th</sup>- 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017

### Birding Extremadura & Casa Rural El Recuerdo

#### Itinerary

**19<sup>th</sup> May 2017:** Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

**20<sup>th</sup> May 2017:** Campo Lugar Plains, Alcollarín Reservoir, rice fields near Madrigalejo, Sierra Brava reservoir

**21<sup>st</sup> May 2017:** Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Monroy

**22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017:** Vulture Hide near Torrejón El Rubio and Monfragüe National Park

**23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017:** Monfragüe National Park

**24<sup>th</sup> May 2017:** Arrocampo Reservoir and hinterland of Saucedilla

**25<sup>th</sup> May 2017:** Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and rice fields near Madrigalejo

**25<sup>th</sup> May 2017:** Transfer to Madrid airport.

#### Trip Report

**19<sup>th</sup> May 2017: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.**

Tony and Tris arrive just ahead of schedule and we had an easy run from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

**20<sup>th</sup> May 2017: Campo Lugar Plains, Alcollarín Reservoir, rice fields near Madrigalejo, Sierra Brava reservoir**

We set off southwards, through the town of Zorita and onto the plains of Campo Lugar. One of the first birds seen was a **Little Owl**, perched on top of a pile of stones. Larks were much in evidence, especially **Calandra Lark**, **Crested** and **Short-toed**. We also had several sightings of **Great Bustards** in fields and several in flight. **Lesser Kestrels** hovered in small groups over the tall late-spring grasses, with some seen well as they perched on fences. As we were concluding our drive, we came across a party of at least nine, perhaps ten, **Hoopoe**, all quick enough to evade the camera. Birds of prey included a **Short-toed Eagle** and several **Black Kite**.

After a welcome coffee, we spent the rest of the morning at the Alcollarín Reservoir, watching a colony of **Bee-eaters** and seeing both **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**, as well

as some engaging **Woodchat Shrikes**. Water birds included **Spoonbill**, **Cattle Egret** and **White Storks** nesting in trees beside the area where we had our picnic. A **Great Reed Warbler** sang from a clump of vegetation close by, whilst **Great Crested Grebes** were in pairs on the water.

After lunch, we crossed the rice growing area, first north-west of Madrigalejo and then to the south. Several pairs of **Black-winged Stilts** were found nesting and we saw **White Stork**, several **Collared Pratincole**, **Black-headed Gulls** and **Yellow Wagtails**. However, unfortunately our only views of **Gull-billed Terns** were distant ones. Two **Marsh Harriers** and a **Buzzard** were also seen.

We returned via the Sierra Brava reservoir, where we had prolonged views of a singing **Black-eared Wheatear** beside the road.

### **21<sup>st</sup> May 2017: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Monroy**

A change in the weather with a fresh easterly wind and generally heavily overcast conditions. We ventured north-west of Trujillo, along the road to Monroy, on the plains to the north of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. Our first stop was on an area of high ground offering a good vantage point and from which we saw at least three **Montagu's Harriers** quite quickly. However, after these first views, there was very little activity, so we then decided to head onto the plains south of the village. Here we had several sightings of **Little Owl**, **Roller** and **Lesser Kestrel**, the first two offering some opportunities for photography, although the light was quite poor. We also found a fine **Black Vulture** standing on the ground.

We returned to the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, where we had our coffee break. Returning once again southwards, we saw more **Rollers**. We then took a long, rough road westward across the open country. This proved very productive for small birds in particular: **Corn Buntings**, **Calandra** and **Thekla Larks**, as well as **Griffon Vulture** and **Bee-eater**. But the highlight was a rather wonderful **Hoopoe**!

We had our picnic beside the Talaván Reservoir, where a **Great Reed Warbler** and **Melodious Warbler** sang out of view, thanks to the easterly wind. Near the village of Monroy, we stopped by some pines and enjoyed an hour of photographing **Azure-winged Magpies**. We then drove through Monroy, returning to Trujillo on the road that we had started out on that morning. We had a sighting of a **Montagu's Harrier**, and managed photos of **Black Kite** and **Iberian Grey Shrike**.

### **22nd May 2017: Vulture Hide near Torrejón El Rubio and Monfragüe National Park**

We set off early (06.45) to rendezvous with the owners of the vulture hide situated just north of the town of Torrejón El Rubio. The conditions were fairly overcast most of the morning, with just a few brighter periods, but the vultures themselves performed

incredibly. Over 100 **Griffon Vultures** and 20 **Black Vulture**, along with three **Egyptian Vultures** kept us royally entertained for well over three hours. This included the rugby scrums at the feeding frenzies. A strong supporting cast included **Black Kite**, a delightful **Hoopoe**, **White Wagtail**, **Spanish** and **House Sparrows** and a couple of **White Storks** which swallowed huge items of offal to carry to their chicks.

Once the show was over, we retired to the town for a coffee and then headed into the Monfragüe National Park.

We made a first stop at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint, where we watched **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Bunting**, **Black Redstart**, as well as **Crag Martin** and **Red-rumped Swallow**. A **Black Stork** had three chicks in a nest on the rock face opposite and both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** were seen.

We had our picnic in the shade beside the Tagus River, where hundreds of **House Martins** were busy collecting muds for their nests. From there we drove to the Castle. Here we watched **Black Kite** and **Griffon Vulture**, as well as **Rock Buntings** close up and a beautiful **Two-tailed Pasha** butterfly. But perhaps most impressive was the amazing views across the heart of Extremadura, a vast expanse of wood pasture (*dehesa*) dominated by holm oak trees.

### **23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017: Monfragüe National Park**

It was a hot, sunny day, with a light easterly wind. We spent the whole day in the Monfragüe National Park, starting at the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. When we arrived, there was hardly a bird in the clear blue sky, just a few **Griffon Vultures** perched on the rock face, However, within minutes we heard the barking call of a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and soon afterwards the pair arrived. We were then treated to more than two and a half hours of non-stop action, the eagles present the whole time and engaged in numerous mobbing bouts with **Griffon Vultures** and on one occasion a **Black Vulture**, and at times being mobbed themselves by **Black Kites**. Also, we watched them perched on the top of the crag, and sometimes performing display flights. It was magnificent. Along with the **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, we saw **Black Stork**, **Egyptian Vulture**, **Short-toed Eagles** and small birds such as **Kingfisher** and **Subalpine Warbler**.

We eventually stole ourselves away for coffee beside a beautiful cork oak grove. From there we returned through the park, making a couple of stops before our picnic at the Tajadilla viewpoint. Here we had good views of **Black Kite**, as well as more distant **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**. We then visited an area where there was a nesting **Black-eared Wheatear** and we watched the male bring food to the chicks.

We spent the rest of the afternoon at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint, switching our view between vultures to small birds like **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting**. A couple of

**Black Storks** appeared and we also saw **White-rumped Swift**, **Crag Martin**, **Red-rumped Swallow** and **Peregrine**.

We completed the afternoon beside the Bull Ring at Trujillo. It was general quite quiet, but we had a few views of nesting **Lesser Kestrel** as well as **Black Kite**, **Short-toed Eagle** and a dark-phase **Booted Eagle**.

#### **24<sup>th</sup> May 2017: Arrocampo Reservoir and hinterland of Saucedilla**

Another hot, sunny day with a moderate easterly wind. We headed north-east, taking the motorway in the direction of Madrid, until leaving it at the town of Almaráz. From there we drove to the village of Saucedilla where we spent the first two hours of the morning beside the reed bed close to the village. Our target was **Little Bitterns** and with patience we were rewarded with excellent views of at least three individuals at the edge of the reeds and perhaps two or three others in flight.

During our stay, we also had excellent views of **Purple Herons**, saw a **Squacco Heron**, a brief view of **Purple Swamphen** and also **Marsh Harrier**.

After coffee, we explored the minor roads to the west of the village, but saw rather little, apart from **Black-winged Stilt**, **Bee-eater**, **Great Egret** and **Little Egret**.

We returned to the Arrocampo Reservoir and beside the main body of water watched **Gull-billed Terns** and the almost ubiquitous **Purple Herons**. At another section we found a small group of roosting **Black-crowned Night Herons**.

We then returned to the first area of marsh and were treated with another view of a male **Little Bittern** fishing, with a coral-red bill in full breeding plumage, as well as a female sunning herself and preening in the middle of the swamp.

#### **25<sup>th</sup> May 2017: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and rice fields near Madrigalejo**

Another hot and sunny day. We stayed on the plains immediately west of Trujillo where we were lucky enough to get views of a calling male **Little Bustard** and brief views of both **Pin-tailed** and **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. We had lovely views of a **Booted Eagle** settled on the ground. Curiously we came across a group of three **Common Cuckoo** and then another single one. But most surprising of all was a fine **Honey Buzzard**, which Tony spotted on the ground. Although it flew off before a photo could be taken, both Toney and Tris managed to get good flight shots of it.

We then moved north of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca where we watched at least three pairs of **Montagu's Harriers**, at times mobbing a **Black Kite**. A stop beside the River Tamuja, although picturesque did not yield any new sightings, so we then drove along the road southwards to look at the **Rollers**, **Lesser Kestrels** and **Little**

**Owls** occupying the boxes there. After coffee, we elected to head south to the rice fields near Madrigalejo.

We had a quick picnic north of the town and then spent the remainder of the afternoon driving across the rice-growing area. We saw groups of **Collared Pratincoles**, a good number of **Black-winged Stilts**, some early returning **Lapwings** (presumably failed breeders) and **Little Ringed Plover**. The heat drove us back homewards with a return at about 16.20.

### **25<sup>th</sup> May 2017: Transfer to Madrid airport.**

We left just before 09.30 for our return to Madrid, taking a stop for coffee at about half way through the journey. As we entered the approach to the Madrid ring road, we became stuck in a traffic jam, caused by an accident ahead. This meant a diversion to take the ring-road clockwise to the airport, a slightly more complicated approach, but we still arrived a good two and a quarter hours before the flight for the check-in.