

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo
EARLY SPRING HOLIDAY REPORT FOR GARY AND CLARE
(26th March – 31st March 2018)

Itinerary

26th March 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Saucedilla and Almaráz.

27th March 2018: Monfragüe National Park

28th March 2018: Plains near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca and cork oaks of Jaraicejo

29th March 2018: Campo Lugar Plains, Alange and Mérida

30th March 2018: Campo Lugar, Sierra Brava, area south of Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and Palazuleo.

31st March 2018: Return to Madrid



Watching Glossy Ibis in Mérida

TRIP REPORT

26th March 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Saucedilla and Almaráz.

Martin collected Gary and Clare at the airport in Madrid at 12.30, and we set out with fine sunny weather from Madrid on the A5 motorway to Extremadura. We were rewarded with spectacular views of the Gredos Mountains, with snow cover on the higher ground.

En route we started to see birds like **Black** and **Red Kites** and **White Storks**. We stopped for coffee about half-way through the journey. The bar was extremely busy with the Easter holiday traffic leaving Madrid and we quickly repaired to the car park for our sandwiches, as **Barn Swallows** flew around us. Shortly afterwards we reached the Arrocampo Reservoir, beside the village of Saucedilla. It was a light south-westerly wind which was enough to keep the reeds moving. We saw a **Purple Heron** and a couple of distant **Purple Swamphens**. **Little Egrets** and **Great Egrets**, whilst **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** glided overhead. A **Little Bittern** was seen briefly in flight.

We then made a stop at an olive grove on the hill above the town of Almaráz. Here we found six species of orchid and also had excellent views of a dark morph **Booted Eagle** and a fine **Short-toed Eagle**.

From Arrocampo it was then an easy drive onwards to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, reaching there just before 18.00.

27th March 2018: Monfragüe National Park

It was a fine sunny day, with some light to moderate wind, but generally warm throughout.

We left Trujillo northwards, across vast expanses of *dehesa*, through Torrejón El Rubio, and on to the Monfragüe National Park. Our first stop was the Castle, which we reached by a wonderful circular walk, taking us through the wild olives and holm oaks on the south-facing side of the ridge, to the top of the ridge itself and then on the upper part of the shadier north-facing slope, with its mixed forest. We had very good views of **Rock Bunting** as we approached the castle. At the castle we had excellent views of **vultures** (all three species) as they flew close, as well as **Peregrine**.

We then continued through the park to the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. As we left the car we had an amazing view of an adult **Bonelli's Eagle**, being mobbed by a **Black Kite**. We enjoyed good views of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** and some **Egyptian Vultures** as well. We had rather distant views of an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** high

above. At our coffee break nearby we heard and saw **Iberian Chiffchaff**, **Mistle Thrushes** and **Azure-winged Magpies** in the cork oak woodland.



View from the castle, with our shadows

We had our picnic at the Tajadilla viewpoint. Here the sky was often quite crowded by **Griffon** and a few **Black Vultures**. We then continued to the Puerta de Serrana viewpoint. As well as all three species of vulture, we also saw another **Bonelli's Eagle** as well as sighting a **Subalpine Warbler**.

We took a walk beside the Tagus River, finding a **Green Hairstreak** butterfly and our first glimpses of **Nettle Tree Butterfly**. We then made a visit at the Peña Falcon viewpoint. Several **Blue Rock Thrushes** were seen flying, chasing each other and singing. **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Crag Martins** hawked insects. We also had good views of **Black Storks** wheeling close by to land. On one **Griffon Vulture** nest we saw a chick moving. On our return journey stopped beside the River Almonte, where parties of vultures drifted overhead.

Gary and Clare had a short visit to the centre of Trujillo, where **Lesser Kestrels** and **Jackdaws** were seen, as well as the nesting **White Storks**.

28th March 2018: Plains near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca and cork oaks of Jaraicejo



Cork Oak grove at Jaraicejo

It was another fine day with warm sunshine, tempered slightly by a westerly breeze. We spent most of the day in the region west of Trujillo, close to the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. We visited first an area of plains close to Trujillo. At our first stop we saw a male and two female **Little Bustards**, as well as good views of **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Thekla Lark**. Close by we had a good view of a male **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** in a field and saw our first (of many) **Calandra Larks**. We followed that by a walk along a dirt track, where we were accompanied almost continuously by larks: **Calandra**, **Thekla** and **Crested**. There was even a **Woodlark** singing near the place we left the car. From the track we obtained very nice views of a large group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, as well as three **Gadwall** in a pool and two **Black-winged Stilts**.

We then drove past the village and along a road heading in the direction of Cáceres. On telegraph posts had been erected next boxes and we saw no fewer than six **Little Owls** along them (with two more on a rock and one afterwards on a fence post our total for

the day was an amazing nine individuals). A party of **Lesser Kestrel** were busy catching flying insects. We also saw a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** flying overhead.

Eventually we came across a party of **Great Bustards**, all males, which strode close to the ridge-top in a field and then sat down to rest. On the other side of the road we found another male **Great Bustard** and we watched it enter full display.

We stopped to look at the River Tamuja's valley where we watched **Serins** and a **Hawfinch**, and then after a coffee in a friendly bar in Santa Marta de Magasca, we stopped beside the River Magasca for our picnic. Here we saw a dark phase **Booted Eagle**, a **Short-toed Eagle** and briefly at some distance an adult **Golden Eagle**.

The first part of the afternoon was spent on the plains north of the village, again to the accompaniment of many larks, but noteworthy was a male **Hen Harrier**. We also saw a fine **Black Vulture** on the ground.

We completed the afternoon north of the village of Jaraicejo. Here we walked across a rock rose and broom heath, where we had brief views of **Dartford Warbler** and prolonged sightings of **Thekla Lark**. In a beautiful cork oak woodland, we had wonderful views of a **Crested Tit** and saw **Nuthatch** and **Long-tailed Tit**. The **Angel's Tear Narcissus** were a delight.

29th March 2018: Campo Lugar Plains, Alange and Mérida



Watching displaying Great Bustards

The day remained dry, although there was a cloudy spell in the middle of the day and the westerly wind was cool. We headed south, past the town on Zorita and then crossed the plains towards the village of Campo Lugar. The sky seemed full of singing **Calandra Larks**. We quite quickly found three male **Great Bustards**, at some distance, but in excellent light. Whilst we watched them, one started to display, and we were able to watch several episodes of this curious behaviour. A small group of females appeared on the scene, presumably attracted by his antics. At one stage, a **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** walked directly in front of this huge male.

As we proceeded, we came across another group to the north of the road. But it was not until we were on a little dirt track did we have our best encounter with them: a party of ten large males in superb light, walking amongst a flock of sheep. The track also offered us excellent views of **Short-toed Lark**. At a small pool we found about almost a dozen **Garganey**, with other ducks, three **Black-winged Stilts** and a **Wood Sandpiper** together with a **Green Sandpiper** which provided a valuable comparison.



Photographing a Spanish Festoon

We then drove south of Mérida to the town of Alange and visited an area near the Sierra de Utrera. It was a very beautiful north-facing slope on which there was an amazing profusion of species such as **Iberian Fritillary**, **Yellow Anemone**, **Green-winged** and

Champagne Orchids and rock roses. We were also very pleased to see some superb examples of **Spanish Festoon**. All the time we were there, a **Thekla Lark** sang above us. We paid a brief visit to the Alange crags where we saw **Black Wheatear** and **Blue Rock Thrush**. From there we looked at a colony of the extraordinary **Giant Orchid**.

We ended the afternoon beside the River Guadiana in Mérida, walking across the Roman Bridge and in the riverside park. It was an extremely productive visit, with highlights including several **Glossy Ibis**, a male **Penduline Tit**, **Purple Swamphen** and **Cattle Egrets** in full breeding plumage.

30th March 2018: Campo Lugar, Sierra Brava, area south of Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and Palazuleo.

It was a day with a sunny morning, dry until lunchtime and then a few short showers, sometimes of hail. The wind became progressively stronger and fresher during the day. As yesterday, we headed south past Zorita and stopped on the Campo Lugar plains, specifically to find **Little Bustard**, to which end we were successful with prolonged views of a male. We were also fortunate with more observations of displaying **Great Bustards**. Two **Northern Wheatears** were the first for the spring.

We then visited the dam end of the Sierra Brava reservoir, spending time watching a colony of **Lesser Kestrel** and then a group of 20 **Garganey** right out in the water. Very special was a roosting **Eagle Owl**.

Stopping a small gravel pit, we found two adult **Purple Herons**. After coffee in Madrigalejo, we spent some time driving through an area of rice fields near the village of Vegas Altas, finding a field with a party of **Kentish Plover** and another with **Glossy Ibis** and **Black-headed Gulls**. We stopped to look at the River Gargaligas, but the recent rain had caused the river to flatten much of the reed beds there. We then drove to the *dehesa* of Moheda Alta, where Gary and Clare took a walk through the flower-rich wood pasture, whilst Martin set up the picnic in the hide overlooking rice stubble fields. There were a few waders present: **Little Stint**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Ruff**, **Dunlin** and **Redshank**. Following lunch, we checked a nearby pool, finding more **Garganey** and a **Collared Pratincole** – the first of the spring.

We returned through the edge of the *dehesa* and rice fields near the village of Obando, finding a **Black-winged Kite** perched on a tree.

We then made our way back home, taking a route via more rice fields near the village of Palazuelo. However, apart from a small group of **Lapwing**, there was not much to see, as it had become very windy. We completed the day cutting across country near Santa Cruz de la Sierra finding a fine **Woodchat Shrike** and a good show of **Barbary Nut Iris** in flower.

31st March 2018: Return to Madrid

An early start back to Madrid with arrival by 09.15 at the hotel.

Annotated List

Despite the generally windy conditions which made locating small birds very difficult, we managed a good total of over 130 species. The weather limited the butterfly list significantly.

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: One near Pago de San Clemente on 27th March of dubious origin.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen on several days.
4. **Mallard**: Seen almost daily.
5. **Garganey**: 11 at Campo Lugar on 29th, 20 at Sierra Brava and 10 at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
6. **Shoveler**: Seen on several days.
7. **Red-crested Pochard**: Two at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
8. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on most days.
9. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Campo Lugar and Moheda Alta.
10. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at several reservoirs,
11. **Great Cormorant**: Seen daily.
12. **Little Bittern**: Seen briefly at Arrocampo on 26th March and in Mérida on 29th.
13. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen at Mérida on 29th March.
14. **Cattle Egret**: Seen almost daily.
15. **Little Egret**: Seen almost daily.
16. **Great Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo on 26th March.
17. **Grey Heron**: Seen at Arrocampo on 26th March and Campo Lugar on 29th.
18. **Purple Heron**: Seen at Arrocampo and Madrigalejo on 30th March.
19. **Black Stork**: Seen at Monfragüe on 27th March.
20. **White Stork**: Seen every day.
21. **Glossy Ibis**: At least four in Mérida on 29th March and six on rice fields near Vegas Altas on 30th.
22. **Spoonbill**: Seen at Arrocampo, campo Lugar and Mérida.
23. **Black-winged Kite**: One seen near Obando on 30th March.
24. **Black Kite**: Seen every day.
25. **Red Kite**: Seen almost every day.
26. **Egyptian Vulture**: Several at Monfragüe on 27th March and two seen at Alange on 29th.
27. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
28. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
29. **Short-toed Eagle**: Seen almost every day.
30. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen at Arrocampo and on rice fields.

31. **Hen Harrier:** One seen on plains north of Trujillo on 28th March.
32. **Sparrowhawk:** One at Monfragüe on 27th March.
33. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost every day.
34. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen in Monfragüe on 27th March.
35. **Golden Eagle:** One seen north of Santa Marta de Magasca on 28th March
36. **Booted Eagle:** One seen on three days.
37. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Two seen in Monfragüe on 27th March.
38. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen at Sierra Brava reservoir, Campo Lugar and Santa Marta de Magasca plains, as well as Trujillo.
39. **Common Kestrel:** Seen at Monfragüe and Sierra Brava.
40. **Peregrine Falcon:** Seen at Monfragüe on 27th March.
41. **Moorhen:** Seen on several days.
42. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
43. **Common Coot:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
44. **Little Bustard:** Three seen west of Trujillo on 28th March and one at Campo Lugar on 30th.
45. **Great Bustard:** Nine seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 28th March, 27 on Campo Lugar plains on 29th and over 30 there on 30th.
46. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at on pools in plains and the rice fields.
47. **Collared Pratincole:** One at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
48. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
49. **Kentish Plover:** Four on rice fields on 30th March.
50. **Golden Plover:** Seen on the plains on 28th March.
51. **Northern Lapwing:** One at Moheda Alta and six near Palazuelo on 30th March.
52. **Dunlin:** About 5 at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
53. **Little Stint:** About 15 at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
54. **Ruff:** About two at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
55. **Common Snipe:** Six near Obando on 30th March.
56. **Common Redshank:** One at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
57. **Greenshank:** Six near Palazuelo on 30th March.
58. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on two days.
59. **Wood Sandpiper:** One at Campo Lugar on 29th March.
60. **Common Sandpiper:** Two at Sierra Brava on 30th March.
61. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen most days.
62. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on two days.
63. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and at Campo Lugar.
64. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** About 50 seen on the plains west of Trujillo on 28th March.
65. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen every day.
66. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen every day.
67. **Collared Dove:** Seen every day.
68. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 28th March.
69. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard on most days.

70. **Scops Owl:** Heard at Pago de San Clemente on 29th March.
71. **Eagle Owl:** One seen at Sierra Brava on 30th March.
72. **Little Owl:** Nine seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 28th March.
73. **Kingfisher:** One seen briefly at Arrocampo on 26th March.
74. **Hoopoe:** Seen every day.
75. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen in Monfragüe on 27th March.
76. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
77. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen at Campo Lugar on 29th March.
78. **Crested Lark:** Seen most days.
79. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
80. **Woodlark:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 28th March.
81. **Sand Martin:** Seen on two days.
82. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost every day.
83. **Barn Swallow:** Seen every day.
84. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen at Monfragüe and River Magasca.
85. **House Martin:** Seen every day.
86. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen most days.
87. **Water Pipit:** Two at Moheda Alta on 30th March.
88. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen at Madrigalejo on 30th March.
89. **White Wagtail:** Seen most days.
90. **Robin:** Seen at Monfragüe.
91. **Black Redstart:** Seen on several days.
92. **Stonechat:** Seen every day.
93. **Northern Wheatear:** Two at Campo Lugar on 30th March.
94. **Black Wheatear:** Two at Alange on 29th March.
95. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe and Alange.
96. **Blackbird:** Seen every day.
97. **Song Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe on 27th March.
98. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe on 27th March.
99. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded on several days.
100. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen at Arrocampo and rice fields.
101. **Sedge Warbler:** Seen at Mérida on 29th March.
102. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 28th March.
103. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen on three days.
104. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen on three days.
105. **Blackcap:** Seen most days.
106. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** Seen at Monfragüe on 27th March and Campo Lugar on 29th.
107. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen most days.
108. **Wren:** Recorded on two days.
109. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
110. **Crested Tit:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 28th March.
111. **Blue Tit:** Seen most days.

- 112. **Great Tit:** Seen most days.
- 113. **Nuthatch:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 28th March.
- 114. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente on 30th March.
- 115. **Penduline Tit:** One seen at Mérida on 29th March.
- 116. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen on plains and rice fields.
- 117. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen most days.
- 118. **Jay:** Seen at Monfragüe and Santa Marta de Magasca,
- 119. **Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie:** Seen every day.
- 120. **Magpie:** Seen every day.
- 121. **Jackdaw:** Seen most days.
- 122. **Raven:** Seen every day.
- 123. **Spotless Starling:** Seen every day.
- 124. **House Sparrow:** Seen every day.
- 125. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
- 126. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields on 30th March.
- 127. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
- 128. **Serin:** Seen most days
- 129. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
- 130. **Goldfinch:** Seen most days.
- 131. **Siskin:** Seen most days
- 132. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
- 133. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Santa Marta de Magasca on 28th March.
- 134. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe.
- 135. **Corn Bunting:** Seen every day.

Other Wildlife

Roe Deer

Red Deer

Iberian Hare

Rabbit

Small Heath

Cleopatra

Green Hairstreak

Nettle Tree Butterfly

Small White

Holly Blue

Spanish Festoon

Red Admiral

Giant Orchid

Sawfly Orchid

Mirror Orchid

Woodcock Orchid

Naked Man Orchid

Conical Orchid

Champagne Orchid

Green-winged Orchid

Angel's Tears Narcissus

Hoop Petticoat Narcissus

Iberian Fritillary

Common Storksbill

Sand Crocus

Barbary Nut Iris

Star of Bethlehem

Spotted Rock Rose

Gum Cistus

Narrow-leaved Cistus

Yellow Anemone

Water Crowfoot

Purple Viper's Bugloss

Field Marigold

Moorish Gecko

Large Psammodromus

Viperine Snake

Spanish Terrapin