

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo
EARLY SPRING HOLIDAY REPORT FOR LEN AND JEAN
(31st March – 7th April 2018)

Itinerary

31st March 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Saucedilla.

1st April 2018: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca

2nd April 2018: Plains west of Trujillo, heathland and cork oaks of Jaraicejo, Miravete Pass, Arroyo de la Vid and River Tozo

3rd April 2018: Campo Lugar Plains, Sierra Brava, area south of Madrigalejo, Puerto Peña, Moheda Alta

4th April 2018: Valverde de Mérida, Alange, Mérida and Canchalejas Reservoir

5th April 2018: Campo Lugar plains and Alcollarín Reservoir.

6th April 2018: Monfragüe National Park

7th April 2018: Return to Madrid



TRIP REPORT

31st March 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Saucedilla.

Martin collected Len and Jean at the airport in Madrid and shortly after 10.30 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. 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. Being Easter weekend there were several groups of visitors present, so we opted to head for an area to the west where we could eat our picnic lunch undisturbed, save by the sound of bill-clacking **White Storks**. Two **Black-winged Stilts** were present and a **Green Sandpiper**. Amongst the **Swallows** and **House Martins** flew several **Pallid Swifts**.

We then returned to the main marsh. We saw a **Purple Heron** and a couple of distant **Purple Swamphens**, and **Little Egrets**, whilst **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** glided overhead. Further on we found a back area of the marsh and here we had much better views of the **Purple Swamphens**, as well as groups of **Spanish Sparrows**.

From Arrocampo it was then an easy drive onwards to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

1st April 2018: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca

It was a fine day with warm sunshine, tempered slightly by a fresh breeze in the morning. We spent 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 Corn Buntings and had good views **Thekla Lark**. Close by we saw our first (of many) **Calandra Larks**. We continued along a dirt track, where we were accompanied almost continuously by larks: **Calandra**, **Thekla** and **Crested**. From the track we obtained spectacular views of a small group of **Great Bustard**, striding majestically on the sky-line. As we left the area we watched a **Black Kite** being mobbed by a **Merlin**. Not far beyond this we had an excellent view of a **Booted Eagle**.

We then drove past the village and along a road heading in the direction of Cáceres. On telegraph posts had been erected next boxes. Here we saw some **Lesser Kestrels** and glimpses of **Little Owl**. Eventually we came across a party of four male **Great Bustards**, the good light showing their bright colours off wonderfully. Returning to the village we saw the first **Roller** of a year perched on a rock.

We stopped to look at the River Tamuja's valley 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 **Crag Martins**, a **Hawfinch** and several vultures passing overhead. **Spanish Terrapins** were basking on the rocks.

The first part of the afternoon was spent on the plains north of the village, again to the accompaniment of many larks. Three **Little Owls** were seen, perched on stone walls, and a distant **Short-toed Eagle**. But more spectacular was an immature **Spanish Imperial Eagle** which rose from the ground close to us.

We had a good walk along an old drovers' trail, seeing more larks and **Corn Buntings**, as well as a passing flock of about 20 **Bee-eaters**, and taking in too the 360° view. From there we headed back in the direction of Trujillo, seeing **Iberian Grey Shrike** and a wonderful **White Stork** colony on an old water mill.

As we drove through Trujillo we saw several groups of people in traditional costume, celebrating Easter Sunday.

2nd April 2018: Plains west of Trujillo, heathland and cork oaks of Jaraicejo, Miravete Pass, Arroyo de la Vid and River Tozo

A day that remained dry almost until the end of the afternoon, sunny in the morning but cloudier in the afternoon.

We returned to the plains west of Trujillo where we found a small flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** and a few **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, but most memorably watched a group of magnificent **Great Bustards** rise over the skyline and stride and feed in gorgeous early morning light.

We then drove north of the village of Jaraicejo where we had a beautiful walk across a broom and lavender heath and then down into a cork oak grove, finishing at a stream. On the heath there were singing **Woodlark** and **Thekla Lark** and as we walked through the woodland, we found **Nuthatch**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. By the stream a **Nightingale** sang, whilst in the sky above three **Short-toed Eagles** were displaying. Flora included two species of narcissus and a beautiful **Spanish Festoon** butterfly.

We returned to the heath where we enjoyed the panoramic views across the *dehesas* to the south, the plains and mountains. **Dartford Warblers** showed themselves very well.

After a coffee stop we ascended to the Miravete Pass where we had our picnic, again benefitting from superb views. We then stopped beside the Arroyo de la Vid. Here we saw **Subalpine Warbler** and **Black Stork**, as well as **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, but best of all was a fine adult **Golden Eagle** that flew past us very low to the ground.

We then spent the remainder of the afternoon on a very pleasant walk beside the River Tozo, here we saw two more species of narcissus as well as fine stands of **Sawfly Orchid**. Birds included a male **Woodchat Shrike** and, on the reservoir, where we ended the walk we found a drake **Garganey**, some **Teal**, **Shoveler**, **Mallard**, **Gadwall** and a group of **Spoonbill**.

3rd April 2018: Campo Lugar Plains, Sierra Brava, area south of Madrigalejo, Puerto Peña, Moheda Alta

It was a day with strong westerly winds and periods of sunshine and clouds, but not until our way home did we get any rain at all.

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 some wonderful observations of displaying **Great Bustards**.

We then visited the dam end of the Sierra Brava reservoir, spending time watching a colony of **Lesser Kestrel**. Very special was a roosting **Eagle Owl**. We also saw a fine **Booted Eagle** gliding over.



We stopped to look at the River Gargaligas, but the recent rain had caused the river to flatten much of the reed beds there. However, there was a party of **Common Waxbill**, a **Kingfisher** and a **Nightingale** sang. We drove along the edge of ricefields, watching many **White Storks** following a plough and stopped for coffee at a friendly little bar in Obando.

Given the fine weather, we headed for the hills for lunch, more precisely to the magnificent viewpoint of Puerto Peña. Despite (or because of) the wind, many **Griffon Vultures** were wheeling over the impressive rock massif in front of us. We also saw three **Black Stork**, and **Egyptian Vulture** and a **Short-toed Eagle**.



We then drove to the *dehesa* of Moheda Alta, stopping to watch a delightful **Hoopoe** as we arrived and then another shortly afterwards, in a beautiful flower-rich wood pasture. We checked a nearby pool, finding 20 **Garganey** and a range of other species including a flock of **Black-winged Stilt** and **Greenshank**.

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 crossed an area of rice fields, seeing a group of **Little Ringed Plover** and a pair of **Kentish Plover** in one field.

We then made our way back to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, as darkening skies made a dramatic effect across the vast landscape of central Extremadura.

4th April 2018: Valverde de Mérida, Alange, Mérida and Canchalejas Reservoir

The high winds of yesterday persisted and we had a mixture of largely sunny weather with the occasional brief shower.

We headed south-west towards the capital of Extremadura, Mérida. We stopped first at some old gravel workings near Valverde de Mérida where we heard **Great Reed Warbler** singing, saw a few **Shoveler** and had great views of three **Bee-eaters** perched on a wire. From there it was just a short distance to the great dam at Alange. There we walked beside the reservoir, with a rocky outcrop to our north. **Thekla Larks** sang almost continuously, and **Blue Rock Thrushes** were also very active. We had just the

briefest glimpse of **Black Wheatear** but better luck with several **Gull-billed Terns**. We also saw a **Willow Warbler**.

After coffee, we drove to Mérida and had a picnic in the shelter of a park beside the River Guadiana. After that we walked over the Roman Bridge, the longest such structure in the world and then through some parkland on the other bank of the river to a point where we could watch an egret colony. It was a marvellous afternoon's birding, with sightings of **Little Bittern**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Purple Swamphen**, **Penduline Tit** and several **Glossy Ibis**. **Booted Eagle** and **Short-toed Eagle** were watched passing overhead. In the park we saw a very early **Garden Warbler**, whilst some late **Siskins** were still present.

On our way home, we stopped just before a shower broke at the small Canchalejas reservoir, here flocks of **Barn Swallows** were busy foraging or resting on partially submerged trees, whilst a party of **Greenshank**, **Lapwing** and **Black-winged Stilts** were also present. Just a few kilometres before arriving home, a beautifully slender female **Montagu's Harrier** crossed the road in front of us.

5th April 2018: Campo Lugar plains and Alcollarín Reservoir.

It was a day with superb weather, sunshine and light wind. We returned to the Campo Lugar plains and almost immediately were watching **Great Bustards**, portrayed magnificently on the sky-line. We saw some displaying birds, but the best views were of groups of males and females resting and foraging. We also came across a group of ten female **Little Bustards** and eventually two calling males, on either side of the group. In this area we saw a remarkable set of birds as well: **Black-eared** and **Northern Wheatear**, three **Rollers**, two **Stone Curlews**, as well as **Short-toed Lark**.

We stopped by a small pool which boasted a flock of **Black-winged Stilts** and a party of **Garganey**. **Yellow Wagtails** were foraging in the wet grass beside the water. Beyond there on the plains, we had some very good views of perched **Calandra Larks**.

After coffee, we proceeded to the reservoir of Alcollarín. Here we spent an excellent afternoon. Lunch was had in the shade of holm oaks, where **Willow Warblers** were present, as well as **Woodchat Shrike**. **White Storks** were nesting in the trees, whilst overhead passed **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, **Booted** and **Short-toed Eagles**. In wonderful granite terrain, full of white broom, we saw more **Woodchat Shrikes**. **Common Cuckoos** were both seen and heard, and a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** showed itself briefly. We found a juvenile **Greater Flamingo** resting with some **Great Cormorants**. On the west side of the reservoir, our focus was directed on the water itself with a good range of species such as **Black-necked Grebe**, **Garganey** and **Pochard**. Three **Collared Pratincoles** provided us with an excellent way to conclude the visit.



6th April 2018: Monfragüe National Park

It was a fine sunny day, with some light 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 Salto del Gitano viewpoint, looking across to the magnificent Peña Falcon rockface across the broad Tagus River. Here we saw a **Peregrine**, perched on the highest point and dozens of **Griffon Vultures**. Some of these were at nests with chicks, whilst others were simply loafing on the crags in the morning sunshine. A **Blue Rock Thrush** also made a couple of appearances.

We made a stop at the bridge crossing the Tagus, where a pack of **Alpine Swifts** wheeled close by. There were throngs of **House Martins** and **Crag Martins**.

We then continued through the park to the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. We enjoyed good views of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** and some **Egyptian Vultures** as well. A **Black Redstart** sang close by, as did a **Wren** and **Sardinian Warbler**. We had coffee at the edge of some attractive cork oak woodland. Passing the viewpoint on our return through the park, we had rather distant views of an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** high above.

We stopped at the Tajadilla viewpoint. Here the sky was often quite crowded by **Griffon** and a few **Black Vultures**. **House Martins** were busy collecting mud for their nests, whilst we also saw **Hawfinch** and a group of delightful **Siskins**, all in song, in the trees around the picnic area. We also saw a **Large Tortoiseshell** butterfly. We then continued to the Puerta de Serrana viewpoint. As well as all three species of vulture, we also were fortunate enough to find a roosting **Eagle Owl**.

We had lunch beside the Tagus River, entertained by **Nettle Tree Butterflies** and a **Subalpine Warbler**.

We took a walk beside the Tagus River, finding more **Nettle Tree Butterfly** and a **Lang's Short-tailed Blue**. We then made a return visit at the Salto del Gitano viewpoint. Several **Blue Rock Thrushes** were seen flying, chasing each other and singing. **Crag Martins** hawked insects. We also had good views of **Black Storks** wheeling close by to land, as well as one on its nest.



We paid a short visit to the centre of Trujillo, where **Lesser Kestrels** were seen, as well as the nesting **White Storks**.

7th April 2018: Return to Madrid

An early start back to Madrid with arrival by 08.55 at the airport.

Annotated List

Despite the generally windy conditions which made locating small birds very difficult, we managed a good total of over 140 species.

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Canchalejas and Alcollarín.
2. **Wigeon**: One at Alcollarín on 5th April.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen on several days.
4. **Teal**: Seen at Tozo Reservoir on 2nd April.
5. **Mallard**: Seen almost daily.
6. **Garganey**: 1 at Tozo Reservoir on 2nd April, 20 at Moheda Alta on 3rd, 6 at Campo Lugar and 10 at Alcollarín on 5th.
7. **Shoveler**: Seen on several days.
8. **Tufted Duck**: Four at Alcollarín on 5th April.
9. **Pochard**: 12 at Alcollarín on 5th April.

10. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on most days.
11. **Little Grebe:** Seen on several days.
12. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at several reservoirs.
13. **Black-necked Grebe:** Six at Alcollarín on 5th April.
14. **Great Cormorant:** Seen daily.
15. **Little Bittern:** Seen in Mérida on 4th April.
16. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen in Mérida on 4th April.
17. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on several days.
18. **Little Egret:** Seen on several days.
19. **Great Egret:** Seen at Tozo and Alcollarín Reservoirs.
20. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
21. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo, Mérida and one at Alcollarín on 5th April.
22. **Black Stork:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 2nd April, Puerto Peña on 3rd and at least four at Monfragüe on 6th.
23. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
24. **Glossy Ibis:** At least four in Mérida on 4th April.
25. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Arrocampo, Tozo and Mérida.
26. **Greater Flamingo:** One at Alcollarín on 5th April.
27. **Black-winged Kite:** One seen near Obando on 3rd April.
28. **Black Kite:** Seen every day.
29. **Red Kite:** Seen almost every day.
30. **Egyptian Vulture:** Two at Puerto Peña on 3rd April and several at Monfragüe on 6th.
31. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen every day.
32. **Black Vulture:** Seen every day.
33. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen almost every day.
34. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost every day.
35. **Montagu's Harrier:** One seen on plains near Pago de San Clemente on 4th April.
36. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost every day.
37. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** One juvenile on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 1st April and one seen distantly in Monfragüe on 6th.
38. **Golden Eagle:** One seen near Jaraicejo on 2nd April and one seen distantly in Monfragüe on 6th.
39. **Booted Eagle:** Seen almost every day.
40. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen at Sierra Brava reservoir, Campo Lugar and Santa Marta de Magasca plains, as well as Trujillo.
41. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on several days.
42. **Merlin:** One on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 1st April
43. **Peregrine Falcon:** Seen at Monfragüe on 6th April.
44. **Moorhen:** Seen on several days.
45. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
46. **Common Coot:** Seen at Arrocampo, Mérida and Alcollarín.
47. **Little Bustard:** One at Campo Lugar on 3rd April and 12 seen there on 5th.

48. **Great Bustard:** Five seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 1st April, 19 on Campo Lugar plains on 3rd and over 22 there on 5th.
49. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at Arrocampo and on pools in plains and the rice fields.
50. **Stone Curlew:** Two on Campo Lugar plains on 5th April.
51. **Collared Pratincole:** Three at Alcollarín on 5th April.
52. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields and Campo Lugar.
53. **Kentish Plover:** Two on rice fields on 3rd April.
54. **Northern Lapwing:** One on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 1st April and two at Canchalejas on 4th.
55. **Common Snipe:** One at River Tozo on 2nd April.
56. **Greenshank:** Seen on three days.
57. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen at Arrocampo and River Tozo.
58. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín on 5th April.
59. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen most days.
60. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen at Mérida.
61. **Gull-billed Tern:** Three at Alange on 4th April.
62. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Two seen on plains west of Trujillo on 2nd April.
63. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** 10 seen on plains west of Trujillo on 2nd April.
64. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen every day.
65. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen almost every day.
66. **Collared Dove:** Seen every day.
67. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Recorded at Alcollarín on 5th April.
68. **Common Cuckoo:** Heard on most days with sightings at Alcollarín and Monfragüe.
69. **Eagle Owl:** One seen at Sierra Brava on 3rd April and Monfragüe on 6th.
70. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains on 1st April.
71. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Monfragüe on 6th April.
72. **Pallid Swift:** Seen at Arrocampo and Monfragüe.
73. **Kingfisher:** Seen at River Gargaligas on 3rd April and Mérida on 4th.
74. **Bee-eater:** Seen or heard most days. Three perched on wires at Valverde de Mérida on 4th April.
75. **Roller:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 1st April and three at Campo Lugar on 5th.
76. **Hoopoe:** Seen every day.
77. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 2nd April.
78. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 2nd April.
79. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
80. **Short-toed Lark:** Seen at Campo Lugar on 5th April.
81. **Crested Lark:** Seen most days.
82. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
83. **Woodlark:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 2nd April.
84. **Sand Martin:** Seen on several days.

85. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost every day.
86. **Barn Swallow:** Seen every day.
87. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen at Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
88. **House Martin:** Seen every day.
89. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen most days.
90. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen at Valverde de Mérida and Campo Lugar.
91. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen in Monfragüe.
92. **White Wagtail:** Seen most days.
93. **Robin:** Seen at Monfragüe.
94. **Black Redstart:** Seen at Monfragüe.
95. **Stonechat:** Seen every day.
96. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen on plains on 4th and 5th April.
97. **Black-eared Wheatear:** One at Campo Lugar on 5th April.
98. **Black Wheatear:** Two at Alange on 4th April.
99. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe and Alange.
100. **Blackbird:** Seen every day.
101. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen near River Tozo.
102. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded on several days.
103. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen at Arrocampo, plains and rice fields.
104. **Sedge Warbler:** Singing at Arrocampo and Mérida.
105. **Great Reed Warbler:** One singing at Valverde de Mérida on 4th April.
106. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 2nd April.
107. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo and Monfragüe.
108. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen most days.
109. **Blackcap:** Seen most days.
110. **Garden Warbler:** One at Mérida on 4th April.
111. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen most days.
112. **Willow Warbler:** Seen at Alange on 4th April and Alcollarín on 5th.
113. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** One singing at Alcollarín on 5th April.
114. **Wren:** Recorded on two days.
115. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen at Alange, Monfragüe and Jaraicejo.
116. **Blue Tit:** Seen most days.
117. **Great Tit:** Seen most days.
118. **Nuthatch:** Seen at Jaraicejo on 2nd April.
119. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente.
120. **Penduline Tit:** One seen at Mérida on 4th April.
121. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen on plains and rice fields.
122. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen most days.
123. **Jay:** Seen near Jaraicejo on 2nd April.
124. **Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie:** Seen every day.
125. **Magpie:** Seen every day.
126. **Jackdaw:** Seen most days.
127. **Raven:** Seen most days.

- 128. **Spotless Starling:** Seen every day.
- 129. **House Sparrow:** Seen every day.
- 130. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
- 131. **Rock Sparrow:** Singing at Alcollarín on 5th April.
- 132. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
- 133. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
- 134. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
- 135. **Serin:** Seen most days
- 136. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
- 137. **Goldfinch:** Seen every day.
- 138. **Siskin:** Seen most days.
- 139. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
- 140. **Hawfinch:** Seen on two days, especially Monfragüe on 6th April.
- 141. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Alange and Monfragüe.
- 142. **Corn Bunting:** Seen every day.

Other Wildlife

Red Deer

Small Heath

Cleopatra

Nettle Tree Butterfly

Small White

Lang's Short-tailed Blue

Spanish Festoon

Large Tortoiseshell

Sawfly Orchid

Angel's Tears Narcissus

Hoop Petticoat Narcissus

Jonquil Narcissus

N. obesas