

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SPRING HOLIDAY FOR PAUL AND CHRISTINE

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

30th April – 7th May 2024



Itinerary

30th April 2024: Pick-up at Madrid

1st May 2024: The plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Trujillo

2nd May 2024: Madrigalejo, Campo Lugar Plains and Alcollarín Reservoir

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5th May 2024: Plains west of Trujillo, Almonte River, Monfragüe National Park, Trujillo

6th May 2024: Madrigalejo and the rice fields, Alcollarín Reservoir, Garciaz and Villuercas

7th May 2024: Return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

30th April 2024: Pick-up at Madrid

Martin met Paul and Christine at 15.15 at Madrid Airport and we headed off through very busy traffic on the Madrid ring road. Thankfully, it eased off considerably on the motorway for Extremadura and we arrived at 18.30 at the Casa Rural El Recuerdo to be welcomed by Claudia and heralded by **Nightingales** in the garden.

1st May 2024: The plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Trujillo



It was a cool start with a fresh westerly wind which persisted all day, with broken cloud. We started on the plains just west of Trujillo, getting acquainted with the cast of larks: **Calandra**, **Thekla** and **Crested**. Later on, during the day we would add **Greater Short-toed Lark** as well. **Corn Buntings** were busy gathering green caterpillars for nestlings. We had distant views of a group of four male **Great Bustards**, which despite the range, gave us a good opportunity to admire their richly-coloured plumage. We also found a **Western Spadefoot** toad crossing the track. We then proceeded to another area of plains just east of **Cáceres**. Here we had prolonged views of a male **Montagu's Harrier** and close views of **Roller** and both a male and female **Lesser Kestrel**. A lovely set of steppe species!

After coffee in the friendly little village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we perched ourselves at the side of a valley, affording superb views, for our picnic. There was a good fly-past of birds of prey, such as **Black** and **Griffon Vulture** and both colour morphs of **Booted Eagle**. However, the pride of place must be the superb view of an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** which we saw dropping from the sky, and then later emerging to give us a great fly-past.

We then proceeded up to the plains north of the village, stopping beside the Magasca River to see **Spanish Terrapins**.

We had a short walk onto an ancient drovers' trail where, whilst **Calandra Larks** sang in a great chorus around us, we found two species of orchid: the **Bug Orchid** and **Long-lipped Tongue Orchid**. We moved then back towards Trujillo and out onto the plains just east of the town. A **Short-toed Eagle** gave us a close view and along another drovers' trail we added two more orchids to the day's tally: the endemic **Green-flowered Tongue Orchid** and **Common Tongue Orchid**. Nearby we saw a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** flying past at great speed.

2nd May 2024: Madrigalejo, Campo Lugar Plains and Alcollarín Reservoir

The wind had eased considerably and there was a mix of sunshine and clouds, with just the very occasional light shower. We headed south, towards the town of Madrigalejo. Here we had good views of a **Black-winged Kite**, both at rest and in flight. **Bee-eaters** were common, and an **Iberian Grey Shrike** was seen briefly. We then went onto the stretch of plains leading to the village of Campo Lugar. Here we found a calling **Little Bustard**, which showed himself from time to time, despite the tall vegetation and the periods of sunshine which brought on heat haze. **Rollers** and **Lesser Kestrels** were also present, as were the omnipresent larks and **Corn Buntings**. Close by, we had lovely views of a **Little Owl**.

After coffee, which gave us a further chance to watch **Lesser Kestrels**, this time at the silo building across the road, we went on to the Alcollarín Reservoir. At the entrance, we enjoyed the **Bee-eater** colony, getting wonderfully close views of these multi-coloured birds. At the picnic site, we found two **Garden Warblers** and watched **Great Crested** and **Little Grebes**, as well as a couple of **Great Egrets**. We continued along the eastern shore of the lake, seeing **Melodious Warblers**, more **Bee-eaters** and several **Woodchat Shrikes**. Moving then to the western shore, we found a summer-plumaged **Black-necked Grebe**, a **Red-knobbed Coot** in amongst some **Common Coot**, **Spoonbill** and a couple of **Little Ringed Plovers**. It had been a very satisfying day.



3rd May 2024: Jaraicejo and Piornal

It was a superb day weatherwise, with little or no wind and sunny periods for most of the day. We started first on the heathlands near Jaraicejo, a beautiful landscape of lavender and broom heath. Here we watched a **Spectacled Warbler** singing on several song posts as it did a circuit of its territory. There were several **Dartford Warblers** in view too, and **Thekla Larks** carrying food for nestlings. A **Woodlark** obliged us with a long song session from a wire nearby. At the nearby Arroyo de la Vid, we had an amazing close encounter with a **Common Cuckoo**.



After coffee, we moved north to climb through Pyrenean oak to reach the broom moorland near Piornal. At our picnic site on the mountain side, we could see **Whitethroats** singing and **Woodlark** as well. We found a couple of rather distant **Ortolan Buntings**. That spurred us on to ascend further and we took a wonderful walk high on the mountain. As well as more **Woodlarks**, **Whitethroats** and **Iberian Dunnock**, we had simply superb views of two **Ortolan Buntings** in song. The views across central Extremadura were amazing, as was the beauty of our immediate surroundings.

We took a short walk around a belt of pines, but by that time of the afternoon, the clouds had thickened and birds became harder to find. In Piornal, Extremadura highest town, the large **Pallid Swift** colony just produced a few birds.

4th May 2024: Don Benito, Almendralejo and Alange

A warm and sunny day and we headed south, to a very different landscape to that of yesterday. We stopped first at a reed-fringed gravel pit beside the River Guadiana near Don Benito. In the gallery woodland of eucalyptus, poplar and willow we heard **Golden Orioles** calling from all directions and even had several glimpses of birds in flight. More obliging was a **Cetti's Warbler** which sang from the same set of branches every few minutes, and a **Western Olivaceous Warbler**, which also proved to have its favoured perches.



Most interesting of all, was a male **Penduline Tit** busy at dismantling an old nest, plundering material to carry to a new one. We also saw **Little Bittern**, **Purple Heron** and **Kingfisher**. It was a very rewarding morning.

We then drove south of Mérida, to the vast landscape near Almendralejo, dominated by olives and vines. Here we searched for a singing Rufous Bush Robin. At the first area we tried, there was no joy. We tried a second and Martin thought he could hear one distantly. We took a small track to get closer to the area. Yes, the sound was certainly a **Rufous Bush Robin**. A minute later one flew from nearby and started singing further along the track, but out of view. We stopped, just to see the bird fly again, this time across a belt of vines.

After a long wait and no sign of the bird, we set off to start looking elsewhere. Just then, we noticed a movement and lo and behold, the **Rufous Bush Robin** was foraging on the ground in front of us. What followed can only be described as magical as we could watch the bird with its tail held straight upwards and its wings fanned, in classic foraging behaviour for the species. A rarely seen bit of behaviour.

Elated, we proceeded to the dam at Alange where we soaked in the spectacle of dozens of **Alpine Swifts**. After a stop for welcome refreshments in the town, we completed the afternoon beside the Alange reservoir, watching **Little** and **Gull-billed Terns**.



5th May 2024: Plains west of Trujillo, Almonte River, Monfragüe National Park, Trujillo

It was a largely overcast day, with a fresh westerly wind and light showers of rain. We started our birding on the plains west of Trujillo, enjoying the wonderful sight of four **Great Bustards** atop a mound of earth. We had great views of **Crested** and **Calandra Larks** and heard very distant **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. We then took the road north to stop at the River Almonte. A **Cirl Bunting** was singing but remained elusive, but we did see **Common Cuckoo** in flight.



Onward then to Monfragüe where we stopped at the iconic viewpoint of Salto del Gitano. As well as the **Griffon Vultures**, we watched a **Black Stork** attending her three chicks, a close **Rock Bunting** and numerous **Crag Martins**.



We then proceeded to our picnic area, seeing a **Black-eared Wheatear** en route, where again there were **Griffon Vultures** and **Black Vultures**. We proceeded after lunch to the Portilla del Tiétar, where to add to the list of birds already seen, we had great views of **Blue Rock Thrush**. A stop in a cork oak grove was a delight thanks to the spread of flowers.



We returned to the main viewpoint to enjoy the rest of the afternoon, taking special attention to nestling **Griffon Vultures**, some of them rather big by now!



There was time on our return through Trujillo to have a fabulous view of a roosting **Scops Owl**.

6th May 2024: Madrigalejo and the rice fields, Alcollarín Reservoir, Garciaz and Villuercas

It was a misty and damp start to the day, but we descended from the clouds and by the afternoon, the sun was breaking through. By popular demand we returned first to the fields near Madrigalejo. After stopping to listen to a **Savi's Warbler** and watch some **Purple Herons**, we quite quickly found the nearby **Black-winged Kite** and were rewarded by superb and prolonged views of this beautiful little raptor. It was feeding on a prey item (a long-tailed rodent) and we could observe it under ideal light conditions. Every detail of the bird could be pick-out. We also saw it in flight to ward off a male **Marsh Harrier** and also to push two **Jackdaws** away from its favourite perch.

We were delighted with this sighting and only withdrew from the scene once the bird itself had disappeared. Onward we went across the rice growing area where the farmers were busy preparing the now dry fields for sowing. However we did see several **Yellow Wagtails** and **Marsh Harriers**. After coffee, we dropped into the Alcollarín Reservoir for a brief stop on the western shore. Here we met David Lindo and two of his guests. We had close views of **Black-winged Stilt**, **Wood Sandpiper** and **Common Sandpiper**, the latter two posed as if they were on a plate of a field guide. There was a distant **Black Tern**.

We then headed to the hills, stopping at the edge of deciduous oak dehesa near Garciaz for our picnic, in a beautiful setting. A **Black Stork** flew overhead. A walk followed this along a path where there seemed to be a **Nightingale** every thirty or so metres, The density was extraordinary. **Melodious Warblers** were also present as were **Grey Wagtails**.

This was followed by a drive to the edge of the Villuercas Mountains, where rocky crags looked over hillsides of cork oak. A pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** were seen all too briefly, and there were squadrons of vultures. Beside the River Almonte near Cabañas del Castillo, we saw a pair of **Egyptian Vultures**, as well as more **Griffons**. The landscape, especially the flower rich meadows in the dehesa were simply breathtaking.



We stopped again beside the River Almonte, further downstream at a beautiful setting. Here we had good views of a **Western Clubtail** dragonfly. **Crag Martins** hawked insects near the bridge where we stood. It was then time to make our way back to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, through yet more miles of dehesa landscape.

7th May 2024: Return to Madrid

Before dawn we bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and made our return to Madrid, arriving as planned at 09.00, despite some very slow traffic on the ring road. **White Storks** were roosting on pylons and, once in Madrid, we saw **Monk Parakeets** in small groups flying over the road.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

Birds of the holiday

Black-winged Kite

Great Bustard

Rufous Bush Robin

BIRDS

1. **Grey Lag Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
2. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
3. **Wigeon:** Seen at Alcollarín.
4. **Gadwall:** Seen at Alcollarín.
5. **Mallard:** Seen on four days.
6. **Northern Shoveler:** Seen at Alcollarín.
7. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on two days.
8. **Quail:** Heard on three days.
9. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
10. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange Reservoirs.
11. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín.
12. **Great Cormorant:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange Reservoirs.
13. **Little Bittern:** Seen at Don Benito.
14. **Cattle Egret:** Seen at Alange.
15. **Little Egret:** Seen at Alange.
16. **Great Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
17. **Grey Heron:** Seen every day.
18. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Alcollarín and Don Benito.
19. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe and Garciaz.
20. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
21. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
22. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Alcollarín.
23. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas.
24. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
25. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
26. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
27. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen on four days.
28. **Booted Eagle:** Seen on four days.
29. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
30. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
31. **Red Kite:** Seen on three days.
32. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on four days.
33. **Montagu's Harrier:** Seen on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
34. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost daily.
35. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen in Monfragüe.
36. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen twice near Madrigalejo.
37. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen on three days.

38. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on two days.
39. **Peregrine:** Seen at Monfragüe.
40. **Moorhen:** Seen at Alcollarín and Don Benito.
41. **Western Swamphen:** Heard at Don Benito and Madrigalejo.
42. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
43. **Red-knobbed Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
44. **Little Bustard:** Seen on the plains near Campo Lugar.
45. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo twice.
46. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
47. **Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
48. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
49. **Wood Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
50. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
51. **Black Tern:** Seen at Alcollarín.
52. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen at Alange.
53. **Little Tern:** Seen at Alange.
54. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Alange.
55. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
56. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Recorded west of Trujillo.
57. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
58. **Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
59. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
60. **Turtle Dove:** Heard at Monfragüe.
61. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen on Belén Plains.
62. **Common Cuckoo:** Recorded most days.
63. **Monk Parakeets:** Seen in Madrid
64. **Scops Owl:** Seen in Trujillo.
65. **Little Owl:** Seen at Campo Lugar and Madrigalejo.
66. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange, Mérida and Monfragüe.
67. **Common Swift:** Seen on one day.
68. **Pallid Swift:** Seen on two days.
69. **Kingfisher:** Seen at Don Benito.
70. **Bee-eater:** Seen almost every day.
71. **Roller:** Seen near Campo Lugar and east of Cáceres.
72. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
73. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Recorded on one days.
74. **Calandra Lark:** Seen every day.
75. **Greater Short-toed Lark:** Seen on the plains near Santa Marta d Magasca.
76. **Crested Lark:** Seen every day.
77. **Thekla Lark:** Seen every day.
78. **Woodlark:** Seen at Jaraicejo and Piornal.
79. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Don Benito.
80. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
81. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
82. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
83. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
84. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields.
85. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on two days.

86. **White Wagtail:** Seen on five days.
87. **Wren:** Recorded on two days.
88. **Robin:** Recorded on three days.
89. **Nightingale:** Seen or heard daily.
90. **Rufous Bush Robin:** Seen near Almendralejo.
91. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
92. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
93. **Black-eared Wheatear:** Seen at Monfragüe.
94. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe.
95. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
96. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen or heard on three days.
97. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen or heard on three days.
98. **Savi's Warbler:** Heard at Madrigalejo.
99. **Reed Warbler:** Seen or heard on three days.
100. **Great Reed Warbler:** Seen or heard at Alcollarín and Don Benito.
101. **Melodious Warbler:** Seen on four days.
102. **Western Olivaceous Warbler:** Heard and seen well at Don Benito.
103. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo and Piornal.
104. **Spectacled Warbler:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
105. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen on two days.
106. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen on two days.
107. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Heard at Jaraicejo.
108. **Common Whitethroat:** Seen at Piornal.
109. **Garden Warbler:** Seen at Alcollarín.
110. **Blackcap:** Seen at Jaraicejo and Piornal.
111. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** Seen at Piornal.
112. **Pied Flycatcher:** Seen at Jaraicejo.
113. **Long-tailed Tit:** Recorded on three days.
114. **Crested Tit:** Heard at Piornal.
115. **Coal Tit:** Heard at Piornal.
116. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
117. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
118. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen in Monfragüe.
119. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Don Benito.
120. **Golden Oriole:** Heard and seen on three days.
121. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
122. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen daily.
123. **Jay:** Seen on two days.
124. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
125. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
126. **Jackdaw:** Seen on two days.
127. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
128. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
129. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
130. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
131. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
132. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Alcollarín.
133. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields and at Don Benito.

- 134. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
- 135. **Serin:** Seen daily.
- 136. **Greenfinch:** Seen on two days.
- 137. **Goldfinch:** Seen on three days.
- 138. **Linnet:** Seen daily.
- 139. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Piornal.
- 140. **Cirl Bunting:** Heard on two days.
- 141. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
- 142. **Ortolan Bunting:** Seen at Piornal.
- 143. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Other species of note

Reptiles and amphibians

Western Spadefoot Toad

Large Psammadromus

Spanish Terrapin

Grass Snake

Dragonflies and butterflies

Western Clubtail

Orchids

Anacamptis coriophora

Serapias lingua

Serapias vomeracea

Serapias perez-chiscanoi