

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SPRING IN EXTREMADURA FOR KEVIN AND LAURIE

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

24th April – 1st May 2025



Itinerary

24th April 2025: Collection from Madrid, Arrocampo Reservoir and drive to Extremadura

25th April 2025: Plains west of Trujillo and Trujillo town

26th April 2025: Jaraicejo heathland and Monfragüe National Park

27th April 2025: Alange and Mérida

28th April 2025: Garciaz, Cañamera, Guadalupe and Villuercas Mountains

29th April 2025: Garciaz, ricefields near Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas and Palazuelo, Alcollarín Reservoir

30th April 2025: Plains north of Trujillo, Cáceres, Alcántara and Segura

1st May 2025: Return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

24th April 2025: Collection from Madrid, Arrocampo Reservoir and drive to Extremadura

Martin met Laurie and Kevin mid-morning, and we were quickly heading out around the southern ring-road and then onto the motorway heading to Extremadura, but we pulled off just short of the halfway point for a light meal at a service station. The weather was magnificent: clear blue skies! Birds seen on the journey included **Red Kite**, **Black Kite** and **White Stork**. We spent the afternoon at Arrocampo. Here a lake which provides cooling water for the Almaraz nuclear power plant, had a fabulous fringing vegetation of lesser reed mace, home to a superb section of birds. Within minutes of arriving, we were listening to **Common Reed Warbler**, **Savi's Warbler**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Nightingale**. Two **Pallid Swifts** passed overhead, whilst higher up were **Cinereous Vulture** and **Griffon Vulture**.



View of the Gredos Mountains from Saucedilla

Along our walk, we watched the brightly marked local **Stonechats**, some **Common Waxbills**, **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Zitting Cisticolas**. At our next stop we watched **Gull-billed Terns**, as well as a beautiful colony of **Purple Heron**. A **Cetti's Warbler** showed itself beautifully. A **Western Swamphen** swam across an open pool.

We continued our visit with a stop at a separate lagoon, where there were a selection of waders including **Common Sandpiper**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Redshank**, as well as some **Black-winged Stilt**. A pair of **Common Shelduck** looked as though they might stay to breed. A delightful group of **Eurasian Spoonbill** were feeding. A **Black-winged Kite** was perched in a distant tree.

Back on the main marsh, we watched a female **Little Bittern** standing at the edge of the vegetation. **Gull-billed Terns** and **Black-headed Gulls** were feeding over the open water. At a final stop we visited a *dehesa* landscape at the edge of the lake.

It was time to move on, so we continued straight through to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, arriving there at about 17.30.

25th April 2025: Plains west of Trujillo and Trujillo town



White Storks

We enjoyed another warm, sunny and practically windless day. We passed through a belt of *dehesa* landscape just west of Trujillo before entering the *pseudosteppe* plains. Here we drove a short distance down a dirt track and then stopped to scan the landscape around. Larks were our first introduction to this environment, along with the ubiquitous **Corn Bunting**. Of the former we had excellent views of **Calandra Larks** and a good opportunity to look closely at both **Thekla** and **Crested Larks**. There was a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle** perched on a faraway tree. We detected the display call of a **Little Bustard** and careful searching and scanning across the pasture which had troublesomely tall grass, we finally found the bird. As time progressed, so the **Little Bustard** moved into slightly lower vegetation, giving us better views of its dramatically patterned neck. A **Great Bustard** was seen flying and then settling out of view, so we decided to move to a position that might offer a better chance of locating it. At first, there was no sign, but luckily, we came across the bird, a large and very colourful male. Kevin also detected the much smaller female in the vegetation close to it. As we stood, parties of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** flew overhead calling.

We moved to the village of Santa Marta de Magasca for a coffee stop in the delightful little main square, where **House Martins** were nesting. We then stopped beside the Tamuja River south of the village. Here we had several views of **Common Kingfisher**, as well as **Crag Martins**

and **Red-rumped Swallows**. Further south were more plains and here on the wires and nest boxes beside the road, we saw at least four **Rollers** and three **Little Owls**, as well as **Lesser Kestrel**, **Jackdaws** and **Spotless Starlings**. Returning northward we saw a fine **Woodchat Shrike**.

We had our picnic beside the Magasca River, where streams of **Griffon** and **Cinereous Vultures** passed overhead. To the plains again, we drove a quiet road, stopping at several points and having a walk along a medieval livestock trail, where there were **Greater Short-toed Lark** and a colony of **Long-lipped Tongue Orchids**. Further along the road, there was a 19th Century water mill and a nearby abandoned house, taken over by **White Storks**.

We returned to Trujillo where we spent an hour and a half having a wonderful walk through history from Spain's second oldest Arab fortress, past medieval fortified palaces, to the renaissance architecture around the Main Square, with figures like Francisco Pizarro, Orellana, Cervantes, the Catholic monarchs, Maria de Escobar and an unknown stone-mason who was a fan of Atletico de Bilbao all making appearances. Birds were not neglected: **Pallid** and **Common Swifts**, **Crag Martins** nesting under the archways of gates through the town walls, **Greenfinches** and plenty of **White Storks**.

26th April 2025: Jaraicejo heathland and Monfragüe National Park

Another day of perfect weather, we enjoyed sunshine all day! We spent the first part of the morning walking on the lavender and broom heathland near Jaraicejo. **Thekla Larks** were abundant and we also saw several **Dartford Warblers**. In cork oak woodland, we had short views of both **Golden Oriole** and **Common Cuckoo**. A **Woodlark** sang above us for almost the whole of the visit in the woodland. Returning to the heath we spent more time exploring that area, finding a **Spectacled Warbler** carrying nesting material.



Dartford Warbler

We crossed vast undulating *dehesas* north of Trujillo, with the snow on the Gredos just visible through breaks in low cloud. After passing through the town of Torrejón El Rubio, the road narrowed as it took us down to cross the Arroyo de la Vid and then up to the first viewpoint in the Monfragüe National Park: the Salto de Gitano, looking across the Tagus River onto the massive quartzite cliff of Peña Falcon. A falcon we did see (a **Peregrine**) but a lot more beside. There were numerous **Griffon Vultures**, a **Black Storks** on its nest, and smaller birds included **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart**, **Serins**, **Crag Martins** and **Red-rumped Swallows**.



Peña Falcón

Following coffee in the hamlet in the park (Villareal de San Carlos) we drove through the park, stopping for a short circular walk during which we had fabulous views of a singing **Black-eared Wheatear**. The colours of the wildflowers on the bank below were breathtaking. We stopped for our picnic at a viewpoint looking down on the Tiétar river. We watched three **Egyptian Vultures** in a tumbling dispute, a **Short-toed Eagle**, a fine male **Linnet** and, just before we left a **Bonelli's Eagle** soaring high above us. Onward, we stopped at the viewpoint at Portilla del Tiétar, beside the Tiétar River. Here **Griffon Vultures** were also present, and **Turtle Doves** called. We had several sightings of **Western Subalpine Warbler** and found a male **Rock Bunting**. Nearby was a beautiful cork oak *dehesa*. We had a short walk there, hearing **Western Orphean Warbler** and **Rock Sparrow**.



Egyptian Vulture

We returned through the park, stopped at the northern edge where again we watched **Egyptian Vultures** and a **Black Stork**, and then beside the Tagus River at the site of the submerged Cardinal's Bridge.

However, there was an opportunity of seeing a bridge equally as ancient on our way to base, where we stopped at the Almonte River south of Jaraicejo, where three bridges span the river, covering centuries of technology and architecture, and a lot of history. A bridge built in 1450 and added to in the 18th century. A bridge built in the late 1950s and finally the modern bridge carrying the A5 motorway, which was completed in the early 1990s.

27th April 2025: Alange and Mérida

We enjoyed another day of fine and warm weather. We headed south-west, passing the little village of Santa Cruz de la Sierra to join the motorway towards Mérida. We passed first through

undulating *dehesa* landscape but after Miajadas, where **White Storks** were nesting on a gigantic tomato, we entered the flatter flood plains of the Guadiana River, with irrigated agriculture. Leaving the motorway, we passed through Valverde de Guadiana, crossed the river and then continued to the town of Alange, beside the large reservoir bearing its name. Here we admired first a busy colony of **House Martins**, before taking a lovely walk westwards with a rocky outcrop to our right and the reservoir to our left. **Thekla Larks** were singing. It was just a few minutes later that we had our first views of a female **Black Wheatear**. A **Common Reed Warbler** gave intermittent song from a wild olive tree. As we returned, we had nice views of **Thekla Larks** and **Stonechats** as well.

After coffee in the town, when a **Golden Oriole** made a brief appearance, we made a brief stop beside the dam, seeing groups of **Alpine Swifts**. **Egyptian Geese** stood on a rocky island. A **Common Kestrel** flew close to the car as we left. Driving to Mérida, we stopped first for a short walk in open riparian woodland just south of the town.



Roman Aqueduct in Mérida

We had our picnic lunch close to the wonderful aqueduct, while **Glossy Ibis** flew overhead and **White Storks** attended their chicks in nests on the ruin itself. From there we moved on to visit the impressive Roman theatre and Amphitheatre. Walking through the town we passed the Temple of Diana and the Arab Fort, then to arrive at the Roman Bridge.

We walked across this beautiful structure. **Common**, **Pallid** and **Alpine Swifts** wheeled around us. **Glossy Ibises** and **Cattle Egrets** flew over towards their colony on a river island. We made our way through the riverside park to get a good view of the colony, seeing that the **Cattle Egrets** and **Glossy Ibises** had young that were already quite large. Several pairs of **Spoonbill**

were present. On our way through the park we saw **Golden Oriole**, **Spotted Flycatcher** and male **Pied Flycatcher**. Best of all was a male **Penduline Tit** foraging in a poplar tree.

We returned to the car park via the Tajona Arch, another impressive piece of Roman architecture.

28th April 2025: Garciaz, Cañamero, Guadalupe and Villuercas Mountains

It was another beautiful day of clear skies, warm weather and amazing locations. We started in the Pyrenean oak *dehesa* near the village of Garciaz. Here we enjoyed a short walk rewarded by **Rock Sparrow**, **Common Cuckoos** and the almost ubiquitous **Woodchat Shrike** and **Bee-eater**. Another walk close to a small river gave us good views of a Melodious Warbler and **Grey Wagtail**, as well as a prolonged view of a **Common Cuckoo** perched on a tree. We then drove through the town of Cañamero and stopped beside the River Ruercas for a short walk in riverine vegetation, where an unseen **Golden Oriole** called.

It was then just a short drive to the town of Guadalupe where we visited the Basilica, had a walk along one of the medieval streets and had a coffee in the square, watching swifts and **Lesser Kestrels**. Taking the road to the north, we ascended to the highest point in the Villuercas Mountains, with stops on the way to look at fossils and a 17th century snow well, surrounded by a wonderful hillside covered with the rockrose Gum Cistus in flower. At the peak itself, we were afforded extraordinary 360° views, north to the snow-capped Gredos mountains, east across the successive ridges of the Appalachian Relief which make the mountain range so famous, south to the Guadiana floodplains and east across rolling *dehesas*. The rocky outcrops at the top provided us with **Common Rock Thrush**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Bunting** and **Black Redstart**, with **Wrens** and **Dartford Warblers** singing. It was a perfect place for a picnic, and we saw just one other visitor.



Appalachian Relief in the Villuercas Mountains

We took the steep descent north-westwards and stopped in the glades of Pyrenean oak and sweet chestnut where we heard and then saw an **Iberian Chiffchaff**, and a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** too.

We concluded the afternoon on a walk through mixed woodland, where we were rewarded by views of **Crested Tit**, Firecrest, whilst a **Golden Oriole** and an **Iberian Green Woodpecker** called.

Returning to Casa Rural El Recuerdo we discovered that almost all of the Iberian Peninsula was under a power outage. With no prospect of electricity that evening, it was dinner by candlelight and improvisations with buckets of water for the bathrooms.

29th April 2025: Garciaz, rice fields near Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas and Palazuelo, Alcollarín Reservoir

Another sunny and dry day, although the fresher easterly wind was quite strong at times. We made a first stop at the area of open *dehesa* near Garciaz, to complete our commitments with **Eurasian Jay** and **Cirl Bunting**. The fine male **Grey Wagtail** was also a joy to watch.



European Turtle Doves

We then headed south from Zorita, across the plains and then to the Sierra Brava reservoir where we made a brief stop to interpret the combination of landscape and engineering that

had derived from Plan Badajoz. At our first contact with the rice fields we saw a flock of **Common Ringed Plover**, and two **Black-winged Stilts**. We had a very good look at a **Greater Short-toed Lark**. Passing two huge thermal solar plants we stopped for coffee at the edge of the town of Madrigalejo, famous for being the place where King Ferdinand had died on his way to Guadalupe. We spent a while driving around the rice fields near the rice-village of Vegas Altas, finding a flock of **Gull-billed Terns** and **Black-headed Gulls**, with a few **Collared Pratincoles**. There were two **Northern Lapwing**. As we left the area we found three **Turtle Doves**, sleeping in a small tree close to the road, and a **Hoopoe** flew close to the car.

North of Madrigalejo we stopped to watch a flock of **Collared Pratincoles**, getting wonderful views of these graceful birds in flight. Lunch followed beside the Ruercas River, where a **Melodious Warbler**, **Nightingales**, **Common Reed** and **Cetti's Warblers** were singing. We came across an excellent wet field in the area near Palazuelo, with a sizeable flock of **Common Ringed Plovers**, and also **Temminck's Stint**, **Curlew sandpiper**, **Dunlin**, **Common Redshank** and **Greenshank** together. A fine **Iberian Yellow Wagtail** was also there.



Collared Pratincole

The afternoon was rounded off at the Alcollarín Reservoir. Highlights here included a distant **Garganey**, displaying **Great Crested Grebes**, **Booted** and **Short-toed Eagles**, but above all some truly lovely views of **Bee-eaters**.



European Bee-eaters

30th April 2025: Plains north of Trujillo, Cáceres, Alcántara and Segura

The day turned overcast quickly after dawn. We had the first drops of rain mid-morning and then for the rest of the day there were showers, which by mid-afternoon had tuned into prolonged heavy rain.

We took the small road north of Trujillo across the plains, swinging westwards. We made a stop at which we quickly found a fine male **Little Bustard**, which because of the cloudy conditions we could view at full zoom of the 'scope, without any heat haze. A **Wood Sandpiper** flew up from a nearby pool as we arrived. A few kilometres further on, at another stop, we watched a group of **Cinereous** and **Griffon Vultures** that had been grounded by the bad weather. South of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, a **Little Owl** sat on a wire, as did **Roller**, **Lesser Kestrel** and **Jackdaws**.

We moved onto Cáceres, having a coffee at the Main Square, buying some umbrellas and then took a fascinating walk through the medieval part of the city. We visited the excellent Provincial Museum, with artefacts from Neolithic to Arab times, and also giving us the opportunity to see the Arab cistern.

Our picnic was in the Parque del Principe, where we sat accompanied by some **close Iberian Magpies**, by far the best views of the trip. A pair of **Golden Orioles** were in the poplar trees as we left.



Iberian Magpie

We then drove for almost an hour to reach the Roman Bridge at Alcántara.



Alcántara and matching umbrellas

Hundreds of **House Martins** were seeking shelter from the heavy rain by perching on the leeward side of the bridge. On the spur of the moment, we continued our journey a few more kilometres to view the Roman Bridge at Segura, looking at it from the Portuguese side as **Nightingales** sang. The return journey to Casa Rural El Recuerdo was in almost continuous rain.

1st May 2025: Return to Madrid

We set off at 7.30, waving farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, under clear skies. There were beautiful patches of low-lying dawn mists in the *dehesa* as we drove on the motorway towards Madrid. It steadily got cloudier as we approached the city and there were even a few spots of rain. The peak of the Gredos Mountain, Al Manzor, was visible through a gap in the clouds. We had a short pitstop at the halfway point and from then on, the traffic coming out of Madrid was becoming very heavy because of the May Day holiday. Inward traffic was light, but since a lane was closed in our direction to facilitate the outbound traffic, our pace slowed somewhat. That being said, we reached Madrid airport a few minutes before our planned arrival time. It was the conclusion of a wonderful mix of birds and history, in the heart of Spain!

BIRDS SEEN OR HEARD

1. Egyptian Goose
2. Common Shelduck
3. Garganey
4. Gadwall
5. Mallard
6. Shoveler
7. Common Quail
8. Red-legged Partridge
9. Feral Pigeon
10. Wood Pigeon
11. Turtle Dove
12. Collared Dove
13. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
14. Great Bustard
15. Little Bustard
16. Great Spotted Cuckoo
17. Common Cuckoo
18. Alpine Swift
19. Common Swift
20. Pallid Swift
21. Moorhen
22. Western Swamphen
23. Stone Curlew
24. Black-winged Stilt
25. Common Ringed Plover
26. Little Ringed Plover
27. Northern Lapwing
28. Kentish Plover
29. Common Sandpiper

30. Wood Sandpiper
31. Common Redshank
32. Common Greenshank
33. Curlew Sandpiper
34. Temminck's Stint
35. Dunlin
36. Collared Pratincole
37. Black-headed Gull
38. Lesser Black-backed Gull
39. Gull-billed Tern
40. Little Grebe
41. Great Crested Grebe
42. Black Stork
43. White Stork
44. Great Cormorant
45. Glossy Ibis
46. Eurasian Spoonbill
47. Little Bittern
48. Little Egret
49. Western Cattle Egret
50. Great White Egret
51. Grey Heron
52. Purple Heron
53. Black-winged Kite
54. Egyptian Vulture
55. Cinereous Vulture
56. Griffon Vulture
57. Short-toed Eagle
58. Booted Eagle
59. Spanish Imperial Eagle
60. Bonelli's Eagle
61. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
62. Western Marsh Harrier
63. Montagu's Harrier
64. Red Kite
65. Black Kite
66. Common Buzzard
67. Little Owl
68. Eurasian Hoopoe
69. European Bee-eater
70. Common Kingfisher
71. European Roller
72. Great Spotted Woodpecker
73. Iberian Green Woodpecker
74. Lesser Kestrel
75. Common Kestrel
76. Peregrine
77. Monk Parakeet

78. Eurasian Golden Oriole
79. Iberian Grey Shrike
80. Woodchat Shrike
81. Eurasian Jay
82. Iberian Magpie
83. Common Magpie
84. Eurasian Jackdaw
85. Common Raven
86. Crested Tit
87. Blue Tit
88. Great Tit
89. Eurasian Penduline Tit
90. Woodlark
91. Thekla Lark
92. Crested Lark
93. Greater Short-toed Lark
94. Calandra Lark
95. Zitting Cisticola
96. Melodious Warbler
97. Common Reed Warbler
98. Great Reed Warbler
99. Savi's Warbler
100. Sand Martin
101. Eurasian Crag Martin
102. Barn Swallow
103. Western House Martin
104. Red-rumped Swallow
105. Western Bonelli's Warbler
106. Iberian Chiffchaff
107. Cetti's Warbler
108. Long-tailed Tit
109. Eurasian Blackcap
110. Western Orphean Warbler
111. Sardinian Warbler
112. Western Subalpine Warbler
113. Spectacled Warbler
114. Dartford Warbler
115. Common Firecrest
116. Eurasian Nuthatch
117. Short-toed Treecreeper
118. Eurasian Wren
119. Spotless Starling
120. Eurasian Blackbird
121. Spotted Flycatcher
122. European Robin
123. Common Nightingale
124. European Pied Flycatcher
125. Black Redstart

- 126. Common Rock Thrush
- 127. Blue Rock Thrush
- 128. European Stonechat
- 129. Western Black-eared Wheatear
- 130. Black Wheatear
- 131. Common Waxbill
- 132. Red Avadavat
- 133. House Sparrow
- 134. Spanish Sparrow
- 135. Eurasian Tree Sparrow
- 136. Rock Sparrow
- 137. Grey Wagtail
- 138. Western Yellow Wagtail
- 139. White Wagtail
- 140. Tawny Pipit
- 141. Common Chaffinch
- 142. Eurasian Greenfinch
- 143. Common Linnet
- 144. European Goldfinch
- 145. European Serin
- 146. Corn Bunting
- 147. Rock Bunting
- 148. Cirl Bunting

MAMMALS SEEN

Rabbit

Egyptian Mongoose

Red Fox