

EXTREMADURA – 17-25 MAY 2014
John & Anne Wilson, John & Diana Tilsley

After a trip by John W and John T in April 2010, when we coincided with an Oriole Birding group led by my good friend Paul Roberts, and a trip in 2011 by John & Anne W in April 2011 [when we had to stay at Finca Santa Martha just along the road], we had all been very keen to re-visit this wonderful area together, for sisters Anne & Di to enjoy the area, and to stay at Vina Las Torres. Bookings by groups in April meant that we had to time our trip a little later, but as will be become apparent, we still did very well.

We flew with Easyjet from Bristol [central between the Wilsons base near Cardiff and the Tilsleys in Dorchester]. The flight doesn't arrive until 08:50 p.m. local time so we flew on 16th and overnighted at the excellent Axor Hotel which is 5 minutes drive from the airport and very handy for joining the M40 motorway with relative ease.

17th May

After breakfast at the hotel, and a stop at the nearby hypermarket for some picnic food, we set off for the drive to Trujillo. As we had done on our previous trips, we decided on a stop off at the Arrocampo Reservoir complex which is about 2/3 the way to Trujillo. Very soon, via the M40 and R5 ring road, we were on the Carretera de Extremadura, the E90. This is well served with Via de Servicio rest areas. After about an hour and a half we were at the exit for Almaraz, and nearby Arrocampo. At this reservoir there are a number of hides although using them is really not necessary as the birds can be easily seen at various points and from the hide access ramps. We were soon into the many heron species here, the commonest by far being Purple Heron. However were also had Cattle Egret, Little Egret, 1 Squacco Heron, a Black-crowned Night-heron in flight, Grey Heron, and a brief view of a Little Bittern flying across the reed tops. We also saw a Great White Egret which appears to be a fairly rare winter visitor [we also saw this bird again on our last day when we called in again]. Also of note were a couple of Gull-billed Terns, 2 Black Terns and surprisingly, a Little Tern. Raptors comprised Marsh Harrier [2], Booted Eagle, and the ubiquitous Black Kites and Griffon Vultures. A Savi's Warbler was heard singing and eventually located, and Great Reed Warblers grated away in the reeds.

After a couple of hours we set off to travel to Casa Rural Vina Las Torres, having called Juan Pedro to say that we were on our way. It was great to meet up with Juan Pedro and Belen again and look forward to their hospitality. After Juan Pedro had shown us around the house & grounds we settled into our rooms and unpacked. First bird at the house was a Hawfinch which had nested somewhere in or near the garden and was feeding a juvenile. We got some excellent photos of the young bird as it sat on a wall, but it did not look very healthy and Juan Pedro confirmed a couple of days later that it had sadly died. The family were busy this evening so we ate at the Hotel Rural Soterrana in nearby Madronera.



18th May

After breakfast we headed off to explore the Santa Marta de Magasca plains just outside Trujillo and stretching between Trujillo and Caceres. Slowly driving the dirt tracks here

we eventually managed to get reasonable views of 3 Great Bustards. These huge birds are not so easy to see at this time of year, when they are breeding and not gathering in large groups. Calandra and Crested Larks were plentiful, and also raptors, with 3 Montagu's Harriers seen, including a lovely male very near the track. We also had 4 Booted Eagles and 2 Short-toed Eagles. The former were regularly seen at various places during the week. Iberian Grey Shrikes and Woodchat Shrikes used the roadside posts as lookouts, Bee-eaters were spotted and Corn Buntings were the most common small bird. The section of track after Santa Marta proved good for Roller and we had close views of 4. The telegraph poles along this stretch nearly all have Roller nesting boxes attached. Hoopoes were also occasionally seen. We made our way to a small river bridge just west of Santa Marta where a stop produced a male Cirl Bunting, Serin, Red-rumped Swallow, Little Ringed Plover, and Nightingale as the highlights. Next up was a larger bridge over the Rio Almonte, where House and Crag Martins were very active and a couple Alpine Swifts made an appearance. We made our way back to Trujillo for an evening meal in a restaurant in the Plaza Mayor. Later, an evening stroll along the track from Vina Las Torres produced a couple of Sardinian Warblers, Collared Dove, Azure-winged Magpies, a Honey-buzzard, Common Buzzard and Booted Eagle and a few other species.



19th May

We decided to 'do' Monfrague NP today as the weather forecast was looking a little dubious for later in the week. On the way we stopped off at the river bridge where the N208 passes over the Rio Almonte. A couple of White Wagtails were here, with Cetti's Warbler and Nightingale singing, Red-rumped Swallows, a Kingfisher, Zitting Cisticola, Spotless Starling and a small colony of Spanish Sparrows.



We eventually arrived at Monfrague and drove up to park on the road leading up to the Castillo which overlooks the gorge. It was pretty windy and chilly so not the best conditions it seemed, but the fly-by vultures still performed pretty well. Here we saw and photographed Griffons at will as they flew by at head height, even at road level by the roadside viewpoint. Apart from the Griffons there were a number of Black Vultures, 2 Egyptian Vultures, Peregrine, Short-toed Eagle, and Black Kite. A pair of Black Storks had half grown chicks on a nest and one adult Black Stork did a couple of excellent close



fly pasts. Blue Rock Thrush was another new bird as was Subalpine Warbler. A couple of Black Redstarts were near the Castillo. A lot of work has been done here since we last visited, and the flat roof of the Castillo which gives the most panoramic views,

now has a safety railing instead of the painted red lines, beyond which was a drop into the abyss! We also picked up 'gen' that a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles were nesting at the far end of the gorge in trees by the Portilla de Tietar. We made our way along the gorge road and stopped for a coffee at Villareal de San Carlos. At Portilla de Tietar I asked a Spanish guide as to the best location to see the eagles and he kindly said we could follow when he took his clients there. He set up his scope pointing at the nest but it was barely visible in the trees and the youngster was out of sight. Whilst they were looking I scanned the sky with my binos and got on to a Griffon Vulture approaching, and then above it was another large bird, but with very different jizz. I was pretty sure it was an adult Imperial Eagle and called to the guide. He got the bird and confirmed that it was and just above it now was the other bird of the pair. They circled around for a good while, allowing good views. We had another Egyptian Vulture here too and Blue Rock Thrush. All-in-all a good day despite it being rather windy. This evening we had a wonderful meal cooked by Belen, as is always the case.

20th May.

We decided to go somewhere new today so we headed down the motorway towards Merida, to visit Cornalvo Reservoir and National Park. This was declared an area of special conservation in 1989. A little way upstream from the main reservoir is a much smaller one with two bird hides. We did a longish walk along the shoreline of the main reservoir and saw a good number of the now 'common' species, and then up at the small 'reservoir' where there were muddy pools we had a Little Ringed Plover and 4 Eurasian Spoonbills. We then moved on to the very large Embalse de las Canchales reservoir to the west of Merida. We didn't have time to walk so scanned from a car park as the best birding areas were too far away for us to do justice to them in the available time. Some Black-winged Stilts could be seen, and few Gull-billed Terns, and a distant Black-crowned Night-heron in flight, and we had a roadside Red-legged Partridge on the way out. According to the available info this can be a good site for waders in the right conditions

21st May

First port of call today were the rice paddies just before the village of Madrigalejo. Gull-billed Terns were in evidence, plus 2 Little Ringed Plovers, Black-winged Stilt, Marsh Harrier, White Storks and Cattle Egrets in abundance. We then moved on to the village of Vegas Altas which is right in the middle of a rice-growing area. Unlike in 2010 the paddies here were very wet and looked promising. As we drove along the narrow tarmac road which winds through the paddies we came upon a nice muddy field which wasn't completely under water. Here we struck gold. It was clear there were a lot of waders present and we soon built a good list: 30+ Collared Pratincole, 20+ Lapwing, 2 Little Stint, 1 Dunlin, 20+ Ringed Plover, 1 Kentish Plover, 1 Redshank, and in a nearby field, 2 Greenshank and a brief summer plumaged Ruff. Also over and on the muddy field were

40+ Black-headed Gull, Gull-billed Terns, 4+ Black Tern, and 6+ Whiskered Tern. Also new for the list here were 2 Iberian race Yellow Wagtails.

We moved on from here to the La Serena Plains to the south. Here, birding was pretty difficult as the wind was very strong and storm clouds were looming. On the drive there we had great views of 6 Montagu's Harriers in total with a pair doing a food pass right by the road. As we sat by the side of the long straight road and had a snack in the car, gathering angry rain clouds provided for some dramatic photography. We drove back through torrential rain and stopped off by a bridge over the Rio Zujar near a sand quarry, just south of Orellana. There were a lot of Great Reed Warblers singing, and we had great views of 2 Common Waxbills on the road. We were also lucky to come across a couple of Turtle Dove, the only ones we saw on the trip.

22nd May

Another plains day. So we headed for the Belen Plains, just E of Trujillo, and boy was it cold – 10 degrees C! After a heat-wave in April, Extremadura was experiencing some unseasonably chilly weather this week. We took a long drive right across the plain, looping round to join the main E90 road up near Jaraicejo. We fairly soon had seen around 6 Great Bustards, this time getting slightly better views than we had on 18th. I was fortunate whilst scanning to have a fairly brief view of a Little Bustard in flight, and that was the only one we saw. The problem with this time of year is that they are paired up and probably in the middle of breeding so not vocalizing. I also had a brief distant view of a



small flock of Sandgrouse but they were too distant to ID to species. Two more Booted Eagles were seen and when we stopped for a snack, an impressive gathering of vultures were noted on the ground, clearly at a carcass of some sort. We estimated around 100 Griffons and a good 10 or so Black Vultures. The common birds – Calandra, Crested Lark and Corn Bunting were in abundance.

Having done the full circuit we decided to head up to an area of

heathland north of Jaraicejo, south of Pico Miravete, which had proved an excellent site for 'sylvia' warblers on the previous visits. However this time it was pretty quiet and the continuing strong wind didn't help. The Corn Buntings didn't seem to mind tho'! We heard a couple of Dartford Warblers and I had a very brief view, but previously we had seen Spectacled and Western Orphean and also Subalpine. A couple of Black Storks soaring overhead were the highlight, and a lone Mistle Thrush and a Tree Pipit were added to the list.

23rd May

Improved weather was promised today and we decided on a visit to another new location for us, up near the Jerte valley north of Plasencia. We drove to the Monasterio de Yuste which is on a minor mountain road off the EX203 between Jarandilla and Jaraiz. The woods near the monastery provided us with Nuthatch and Blackcap and John T got on to a Common Redstart, and we also had Cuckoo here and common species such as Blackbird, Wren, Jay, and Robin. We continued on the mountain road, the CCV913, and passing through oak woods and then into an open rocky area with low scrub. This looked promising so we stopped and explored. Walking up the rocky slope I saw a bird hop up onto a rock top, and there was a superb male Black-eared Wheatear. Everyone soon got on to this gem and we had many good views. It was otherwise pretty quiet here so we moved on, reaching the lovely mountain town of Garganta la Olla. We picnicked at a Morador overlooking the town and were rewarded with a fly-by male Golden Oriole. Thence onwards towards Piornal. We reached the top of the pass, called Puerto Piornal where there is a minor mountain road you can walk. We spent about an hour here and found Dartford Warbler and had excellent views of a singing male Spectacled Warbler. Thekla Larks were also here, and at least 4 Wood Larks. Dunnock was a new bird [a fairly high altitude bird here], and Stonechats were seen on several occasions. Time was marching on so we decided to walk back. Just before doing so I noticed a bird [atop a rock again] and scoped it up – a superb singing male Ortolan Bunting! Everyone had good views. Walking back along the road, a Honey-buzzard drifted over, then a Booted Eagle, then a Short-toed Eagle. We made our way down the other side and joined the main road down the Jerte Valley [which deserves at least a full day's exploration itself]. We made our way back to Trujillo via the Monfrague road [EX208] and unfortunately got stuck behind a coach all the way through Monfrague NP – nowhere to overtake along this narrow road.

24th May

An exploration to the east of Trujillo and Vina Las Torres today. Just south down the EX208 we took a minor road at Conquista de la Sierra [the CCV235] and drove via Garciaz and Berzocana, to Cabanas del Castillo, a small village with a little Castle or Castillo perched on a rocky outcrop above. This is listed as a site for Black Wheatear so we walked up to the Castillo but dipped [again!]. We did get Black Redstart and a Rock Bunting and were buzzed at the Castillo by a couple of Alpine Swift – spectacular. Down near the village



a male Golden Oriole flew across the road. We moved on and stopped at a river bridge below Retamosa, listed as a possible site for Bonelli's Eagle. We picnicked here to give it some time, but had no luck. Grey Wagtails were on the river. We then made our way via Robledollano and Castanar de Ibor, to the EX118 and down to Pico Villuercas where we carefully drove up the track to the top of the mountain by the old, now disused, military installation. Here you are at 1580m and the views are wonderful. Once parked up something bizarre happened. I got out of the car and immediately heard a thrush like song, and after a scan around, there was a male Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush singing at the top of a radio mast. I scoped it up and all had a good view. It sang for a good few minutes then dropped down out of sight and we could not find it again despite walking all round the area. Exactly the same thing had happened when John T and I had come here in 2010 except the song post was a rock. Standing on the concrete helipad at the very top gives excellent views all round. A familiar call soon had us watching 2 pairs of Red-billed

Chough flying around. Three Black Redstarts were on the rocky terrain, a Booted Eagle and a Peregrine flew over and a Subalpine Warbler sang in the scrub. Coming down off the helipad and another song was heard and soon revealed a Rock Bunting singing from the top of a concrete post. Another good day's birding came to an end so we drove down into the beautiful town of Guadalupe and its fabulous monastery. We had a coffee in the Plaza Mayor and then wandered around the streets by the monastery taking photos. Then back to Vina Las Torres to change before heading into Trujillo for a final meal. Again Juan Pedro and Belen were indisposed as their very talented daughter Marina, was giving a piano recital. We had our final meal outside at a restaurant in the Plaza Mayor in Trujillo. There was much oohing and aahing at a nearby restaurant where they had rigged up outside large screen TVs for customers to watch the Champions League final between Atletico and Real Madrid – there was quite an atmosphere.

25th May

Our last day. We had our breakfast and settled the bill with Juan Pedro & Belen and had a last chat, before packing our stuff in the car and bidding a sad farewell to them and also their lovely dog Kimi. A quick visit to the local car wash cleaned all the plains' dust off, and as the flight wasn't until 21:25 we had time to call in again at Jaraicejo briefly – still pretty quiet - and then spend a couple of hours at Arrocampo, before heading to Madrid. Arrocampo turned up all the usual herons, and a superb sub adult male Marsh Harrier quartering the field right next to us just as we got out of the car. Unfortunately cameras were not at the ready! A new bird for the list here was Gadwall, picked up when a group of three flew up from behind some reeds. A Little Bittern also put in a brief fly-by appearance.

Once done we had a good lunch at a nearby Via de Servicio right by the E90 access junction. The 'comedor' section was heaving with footie fans heading back from Lisbon where the final had been played, so we ate in the quieter self service section where a very nice three course meal including drink for 9 euros, made what they charge at UK service areas a lot more than daylight robbery.

Apart from a slight hiccup when I managed to navigate us to Terminal 4 instead of Terminal 1 at Madrid airport [my reasonable grasp of Spanish rescued us there!], we were there in good time, and finally arrived home from Bristol at 12:30 Monday morning.

A very heartfelt thanks to Juan Pedro and Belen for their warm hospitality, lovely accommodation and excellent food & wine.

The trip list total was 124 species which compares very favourably with what you can expect in the peak season in April.

John Wilson May 2014



Species list starts next page

Species Name	Latin Name	
Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus	
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	Arrocampo, Monfrague
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	
Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea	Arrocampo - many
Cattle Egret	Bulbulcus ibis	Common most locations
Great White Egret	Egretta alba	1 Arrocampo, 17 th and 25 th
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	
Squacco Heron	Ardeola ralloides	1 Arrocampo
Black-crowned Night-heron	Nycticorax nycticorax	1 Arrocampo, 1 Las Canchales
Little Bittern	Ixobrychus minutus	1 Arrocampo, 2 occasions
Black Stork	Ciconia nigra	2 Monfrague, 2 Jaraicejo overhead
White Stork	Ciconia ciconia	everywhere
Spoonbill	Platelea leucorodia	4 Las Mueblas
Gadwall	Anas strepera	3 Arrocampo
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	
Honey-buzzard	Pernis apivorus	1 Vina Las Torres, 1 Puerto Piornal
Black Kite	Milvus migrans	common
Red Kite	Milvus milvus	1 E90 N of Arrocampo, 1 Arrocampo
Black Vulture	Aegypius monachus	Monfrague, Plains
Griffon Vulture	Gyps fulvus	common
Egyptian Vulture	Neophron percnopterus	Monfrague
Short-toed Eagle	Circaetus gallicus	Santa Mart plains, Pto de Piornal
Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus	Plains
Marsh-harrier	Circus aeruginosus	Arrocampo. Madrigalejo
Buzzard	Buteo buteo	
Spanish Imperial Eagle	Aquila adalberti	Monfrague - Portilla de Tietar
Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus	Fairly common
Lesser Kestrel	Falco naumanni	Trujillo bullring
Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	
Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus	Monfrague, Pico Villuercas
Red-legged Partridge	Alectoris rufa	Various, from car
Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	
Purple Swamphen	Porphyrio porphyrio	Arrocampo
Coot	Fulica atra	
Little Bustard	Tetrax tetrax	Belen plains
Great Bustard	Otis tarda	Santa Marta & Belen plains
Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	Vegas Altas & various
Collared Pratincole	Glareola pratincola	Vegas Altas
Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus	Vegas Altas
Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	Vegas Altas
Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius	Various rivers
Kentish Plover	Charadrius alexandrinus	Vegas Altas
Redshank	Tringa totanus	Vegas Altas
Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	Vegas Altas
Little Stint	Calidris minuta	Vegas Altas
Dunlin	Calidris alpina	Vegas Altas
Ruff	Philomachus pugnax	Vegas Altas
Black-headed Gull	Larus ridibundus	Vegas Altas
Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybridus	Vegas Altas
Black Tern	Chlidonias niger	Vegas Altas, Arrocampo
Gull-billed Tern	Sterna nilotica	Vegas Altas, Arrocampo
Little Tern	Sterna albifrons	Arrocampo
Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	
Turtle-dove	Streptopelia turtur	R. Zujar area
Collared-dove	Streptopelia decaocto	
Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus	

Alpine Swift	Tachymarptis melba	Cabanas del Castillo, Rio Almonte
Pallid Swift	Apus pallidus	Trujillo bullring
Swift	Apus apus	
Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis	
Bee-eater	Merops apiaster	
Roller	Coracias garrulus	Santa Marta plains
Hoopoe	Upupa epops	common
Calandra Lark	Melanocorypha calandra	Common on the plains
Crested Lark	Galerida cristata	common
Thekla Lark	Galerida theklae	Puerto de Piornal
Wood Lark	Lullula arborea	Puerto de Piornal
Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	
Crag Martin	Hirundo rupestris	Common in suitable areas
Swallow	Hirundo rustica	
Red-rumped Swallow	Hirundo daurica	
House Martin	Delichon urbica	
Blue-headed Wagtail [iberiae]	Motacilla flava iberiae	Vegas Altas
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	On suitable rivers
White Wagtail	Motacilla alba alba	
Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis	Jaraicejo
Iberian Grey Shrike	Lanius meridionalis algeriensis	Plains, Jaraicejo
Woodchat Shrike	Lanius senator	common
Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	
Dunnock	Prunella modularis	Piornal
Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush	Monticola saxatilis	
Blue Rock-thrush	Monticola solitarius	Castillo, Monfrague
Blackbird	Turdus merula	
Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus	Jaraicejo
Nightingale	Luscinia megarhynchos	fairly common
Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros	Rocky habitats
Redstart	Phoenicurus phoenicurus	Monasterio de Yuste
Stonechat	Saxicola torquata	
Black-eared Wheatear	Oenanthe hispanica	Monasterio de Yuste road
Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis	Arrocampo
Cettis Warbler	Cettia cetti	common
Savis Warbler	Locustella luscinioides	Arrocampo
Reed-warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus	
Great Reed-warbler	Acrocephalus arundinaceus	Arrocampo, Rio Zujar
Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	Monasterio de Yuste
Sardinian Warbler	Sylvia melanocephala	Vina Las Torres
Subalpine Warbler	Sylvia cantillans	scrub
Spectacled Warbler	Sylvia conspicillata	Puerto de Piornal
Dartford Warbler	Sylvia undata	Jaraicejo, Puerto de Piornal
Great Tit	Parus major	
Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus	
Nuthatch	Sitta europaea	Monasterio de Yuste
Jay	Garrulus glandarius	Monasterio de Yuste
Azure-winged Magpie	Cyanopica cyana	common
Magpie	Pica pica	
Chough	Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax	Pico Villuercas
Jackdaw	Corvus monedula	
Carrion Crow	Corvus corone	
Common Raven	Corvus corax	
Golden Oriole	Oriolus oriolus	Cabanas del Castillo
Spotless Starling	Sturnus unicolor	common
Corn Bunting	Miliaria calandra	common
Rock Bunting	Emberiza cia	Cabanas del Castillo, Pico Villuercas

Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	Puerto de Piornal
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	Nr Santa Marta de Magasca
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	
Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Vina Las Torres, Jaraicejo [flew over]
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	Rio Zujar
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	Rio Almonte bridge EX208