

Extremadura

18th April - 25th April 2019

Belen Plains, Santa Marta de Magasca, Campo Lugar &
Arracampo

Having spent more time in airports and in the air than we care to remember last year, this year we opted for a short haul flight so we decided to return to southern central Spain, where we would spend 7 days at Martin Kelsey's place, hoping to do a little relaxed birding.

Getting there

We would fly with Iberian Express from Birmingham to Madrid terminal 4. Priority boarding, extra leg room and XL seats brought the total cost for the two of us to £350-42p, not the cheapest of low cost carriers.

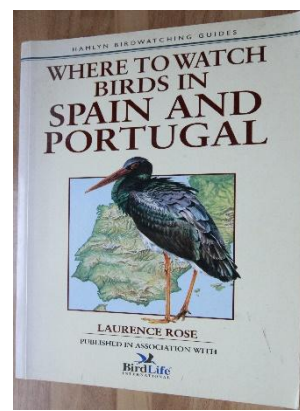
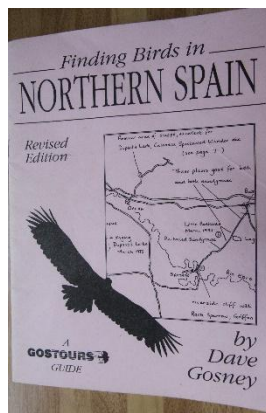
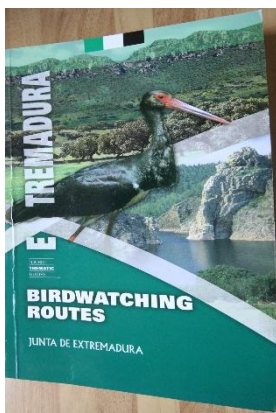
Our hire car was obtained through Iberian Express, Avis was the hire company chosen, the make of car was an Opel Mokka or similar and the cost was €587.09. The car would be collected from Terminal 4 at Madrid airport.

Casa Recuerdo

Casa Recuerdo was our chosen accommodation. Casa Recuerdo is situated in a small village some 13k from Trujillo and it is the perfect place to explore the iconic birding spots of Extremadura. Owned and run by Martin and Claudia Kelsey, it really is a home from home. A full description of the property and the services they provide can be found on

<http://www.casaruralelrecuerdo.com/2/index.html>.

Although we have visited this part of Spain on six occasions, and Europe dozens of time we still take a field guide and if possible books containing birding sites in the area we are visiting. To this end we have included "Where to watch birds in Spain & Portugal" by Laurence Rose, "Extremadura, birdwatching routes" by Junta de Extremadura and Gosney's "Finding Birds in Northern Spain", although god only knows why Dave Gosney thinks Extremadura is in Northern Spain! Our field guide of choice is Collins Bird Guide.



All the publications chosen are fairly ancient but all, hopefully contain enough relevant information to warrant their inclusion.

We have a reciprocal arrangement with our friends and neighbours Brian & Brenda, we transport each other to and from B'ham airport. Why pay rip off car park charges and extortionate taxi fares when you don't need to? This trip worked out very well as we were both flying out of Birmingham within half an hour of each other, us to Spain, Brian & Brenda to Portugal.

Having last visited the area in late March/early April 2017 we were left with the impression that we were a little too early for the later migrants, we encountered Bee-eaters on our last day for example. The second week of this trip was spent in the Grendos Mountains, where it became abundantly clear that the upland birds had not arrived.

Bird Guide

We engaged a local bird guide through El Recuerdo, Ricardo Montero. Although we had birded the area previously on several occasions, we felt we knew the area as well as most, we were still short of good photos of some of the area's iconic birds. Both Sandgrouse, Little Bustard, Great Spotted Cuckoos and several others were still required. With greater knowledge of the area and hopefully with up to date knowledge of the location of these birds, it was hoped it would increase our chances of encountering our target species. It was agreed that he would guide us on the 21st-22nd of April, cost including picnic lunch was 90 euros each per-day.

Day 1 18th April 2019

Brian arrived at the prescribed time to take us to the airport. The weather was sunny with clear blue skies. With no hold ups we soon arrived at the airport only to be confronted by a border guard who singled us out for questioning. He wanted to know where we going, he then asked to see our passports. He asked how much money we were carrying, and then demanded to see it, we were introduced to a sniffer dog for closer inspection. Satisfied we were not master criminals we were eventually sent on our way. The plane left bang on time and we were soon touching down in a very grey and wet Madrid. Our drive down to Trujillo was through several heavy storms, the dramatic lightening displays and extreme rain stopped once we were about 20k from our destination. The temperature rose from a chilly 10 degrees to a more acceptable 16°C. In such conditions birds were understandably thin on the ground, most of the raptors that were seen were impossible to identify through the gloom however the birds that were positively identified, were:

White Stork, Red Kite, Spotless Starling, Magpie, Griffin Vulture. As we entered the village we saw a Red-rumped Swallow, several Crag Martins and an Azure-winged Magpie.

Introductions completed we were shown to our room. This was called "Olivio" and was in the main house. The day was completed with a rather bland meal of vegetable soup, meatballs, potatoes and cabbage; the sweet consisted of stewed Quince.

Day 2 19TH April 2019



Our first day's real birding, the day dawned grey cold and wet, not the best start to a birding trip we have had. Having travelled for most of yesterday we decided to keep things local. Our first destination was the Belen plains a twenty minute drive from the accommodation. The

plains were grey and wet with rain showers on and off, the temperature gauge in the car registered 5 degrees. White Storks were abundant with several flocks in double figures. Raptors were also surprisingly plentiful despite the weather, passerines keep our interest with many of the migrants now established on territory. After lunch we did the Santa Marta de Magasca track and the road through Monroy and back to Trujillo. Great Bustards were seen at both venues, few in number and at a distance.



Birds seen today

Little Egret, Cattle Egret, White Stork, Mallard, Red Kite, Black Kite, Griffon Vulture, Black Vulture, Montagu's Harrier, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Moorhen, Great Bustard, Black-winged Stilt, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Greater-spotted Cuckoo, European Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Calandra Lark, Crested Lark, Thekla Lark, Great Tit, Lesser Grey Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie, Magpie, Raven, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow, Spanish Sparrow, Goldfinch, Corn Bunting Yellow Wagtail.

Day 3 20th April 2019

A brighter start to the day today although there was evidence of heavy overnight rain. We decided to continue with steppe birds and proceeded to the open plains around Campo Lugar. Several



displaying Great Bustards were seen almost immediately, then just the usual larks and chats; the sun had begun to break through at this point, the first Mediterranean type weather since our arrival. The rest of the day was spent unsuccessfully trying to locate some small salt lagoons we had found on a previous trip that had held lots of passage waders. A return to a winter roost of Stone Curlew produced nothing. We lunched at a reservoir view point and added Cormorant to our trip list, perhaps a raft of 100 were present. A trip to the supermarket in Trujillo was followed by a walk around our village where we added several trip ticks, our evening meal was as memorable as the previous one.

Birds seen today

Little Grebe, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, White Stork, Mallard, Red Kite, Black Kite, Black Vulture, Hen Harrier, Common Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Moorhen, Great Bustard, Collared Dove, Greater-spotted Cuckoo, European Bee-eater, Calandra Lark, Crested Lark, Thekla Lark, Crag Martin, Barn Swallow, Red-rumped Swallow, House Martin, Stonechat, Blackbird, Sardinian Warbler, Great Tit, Woodchat Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie, Magpie, Raven, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Corn Bunting, Nightingale, European Roller.

Day 4 21st April 2019

Today was our first day with our guide Ricardo. He arrived on time,



which is always an encouraging sign; having discussed what birds we would like to see, a plan of action was agreed. Little Bustard was the first target bird and we were soon enjoying views of a scoped bird doing his head throwing call. Both sandgrouse soon followed but all sightings were of small flocks in

flight. A mid-morning coffee was had at the charming town of Monroy. Full-on birding followed until our picnic lunch a 14-30. A roller colony had been visited affording wonderful views of these colourful birds, a bridge containing a mixed colony of Alpine Swift, Crag Martin and House Martin. We visited a kill which contained over 100 Griffon Vultures and the odd Black. Many raptors were seen including a Short-tailed Eagle



with a half swallowed snake. Trip ticks came at regular intervals throughout the rest of the day with us arriving back at our digs just in time for a very quick shower prior to our less than eagerly awaited evening meal.

New birds seen today

Great Egret, Short-toed Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Red-legged Partridge, Little Bustard, Cuckoo, Little Owl, Alpine Swift, Pallid Swift, Mistle Thrush, Blue Tit, Jackdaw, Chaffinch, Serin, Western Orphean Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Alpine Swift, Short-toed Lark, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Blue Rock Thrush, Golden Oriole, Tawny Pipit, Stone Curlew.

Day 5 22nd April 2019

Today was our second & last day with Ricardo. The day started with clear blue skies and it wasn't long before the sun had pushed the temperature into the low70's. What a simply brilliant guide he had been, both hearing and sight are superhuman, his knowledge of the area is unsurpassed, his picnic



lunches were more than adequate, and his vehicle a Dacia Duster with lots of room for 2 and all the gear. Our first stop was a gated road with dense Broom type plants on either side of the track. Dartford, Orphean, Spectacled and Subalpine Warblers were our intended targets and we saw all very well. Our next stop was at a small pine plantation where we were soon having great views of Crested Tit. We lunched at the picnic site on the Arrocampo Reserve before proceeding to a spot overlooking a quarry where we had scoped views of a European Eagle Owl. An unsuccessful attempt for Penduline Tit was soon forgotten when we found our next quarry,

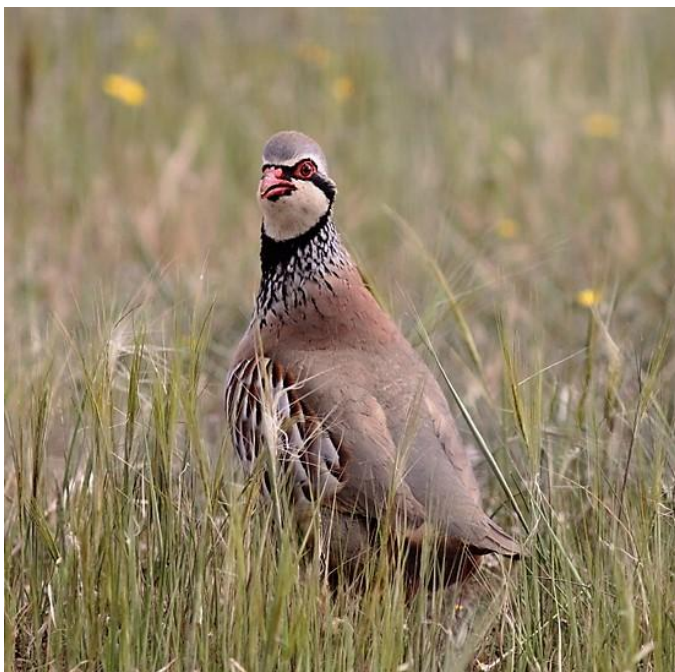
Black-winged Kite. Several more trip ticks were added on our return journey. We arrived back at base in time for a leisurely shower and a fair to middling evening meal.

New birds seen today

Great-crested Grebe, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Shoveler, Egyptian Goose, Egyptian Vulture, Purple Swamphen, Subalpine Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Woodlark, Crested Tit, Gull-billed Tern, Eagle Owl, Spoonbill, Black-winged Kite, Glossy Ibis, Coot, Greenshank, Gadwall.

Day 6 23rd April 2016

What a difference a day makes, we awoke to leaden skies and an external temperature of 7°. This rose to the dizzy heights of 12° by noon before plummeting down to 5° by mid-afternoon. Our first port of call was a nearby village where Scops Owls can be found in the small town park. On arrival we were immediately confronted by the noise of men at work, they appeared to be removing the play equipment which had obviously been well-concreted in. A Wren could just be heard above the din and as this was a trip tick we set about locating it. Wren found, we abandoned our search for the Owl and



headed for the Belen Plains with little expectation of seeing a great deal due to the very damp weather. We should be clairvoyants, for that's exactly what happened. We stopped at our favourite café for a warm drink and to supplement our meagre rations at the hotel. A large plate of Patatas Fritas and

mayonnaise hit the spot. Refreshed we headed out on the Santa Marta de Magasca track, heavy incessant rain soon scuppered that idea and we returned to base by mid-afternoon.

New birds seen today

Wren,

With just the Wren added other notable birds seen were Lesser-grey Shrike, Black Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Black & Red Kite, 50+ strong flock of white Storks, Raven, Common Cuckoo, Roller, Black-winged Stilt, Great Egret, Egyptian Goose.

Day 7 24th April 2019

With rain and strong winds forecast we decided to return to Arrocampo. Several hides will allow shelter should the forecast be accurate. We stopped at Arrocampo with Ricardo but just to use the picnic area,



we agreed we would do the reserve on our own. Unfortunately the forecast was absolutely correct, driving heavy rain and temperatures in single figures: the birds were few and far between, nevertheless we managed to increase our trip list by 3. We returned to Recuerdo a little after 16-00.

Birds seen today

Little Grebe, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Squacco Heron, Great Egret, White Stork, Mallard, Ferruginous Duck, Red Kite, Black Kite, Marsh Harrier, Black-headed Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Purple

Swamphen, Moorhen, Coot, Water Rail, Black-winged Stilt, Common Swift, Barn Swallow, Sand Martin, House Martin, Blackbird, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's Warbler, Waxbill.

Day 8 25th April 2019

Today we moved from Recuerdo to our second hotel. The Hilton at Madrid Airport where we spent a very comfortable last night in Spain. Our return flight was delayed due to "Storm Hannah" weather over Britain. The flight became a little bumpy once in British air control. Sick bags were in evidence although we were O.K.

Ricardo Montero birdwatching and wildlife photography guide

During our stay at Recuerdo we used Ricardo on two occasions, and were very impressed with both his phenomenal hearing and eyesight. Ricardo would see or hear birds that only became obvious to us once picked out with a scope. Being born in Extremadura near the Monfrague National Park, Ricardo has an exceptional knowledge of the region that only a life time living there would bring. Others at Recuerdo also used Ricardo during our visit and all had nothing but praise for his guiding. Ricardo has a good grasp of English and calls all birds seen in English. A more than adequate packed lunch is provided in the price which is €90.00p.p. Ricardo can be contacted on birdingholidays@gmail.com



Moans Groans & memorable moments

This holiday was very short on memorable moments, with moans and groans taking precedence.

Moan The unseasonable wet, cold and windy weather which prevailed during the extent of this trip.

Groan Our room at EL Recuerdo was named Olivio, this room is on the corner of the building and has a very poor outlook due to a clump of Almond trees directly outside the only window. This made the room very dark and required the constant use of the low wattage light. This room was not at all welcoming when returning from a cold wet day in the field.

Moan Our treatment by border guards and airport security. We have both turned 70 and we think, typical British OAP's. Yet we were singled out of the booking-in queue. Firstly we were asked where we were going, this seemed strange as we were in the Iberia queue for the flight to Madrid. Once our destination was ascertained we were asked to produce our passports. Having thumbed through our passports it was commented that we were "well-travelled". We were then asked how much money we were taking with us, and then asked to produce it. We were then asked to produce the receipt. Once satisfied we were not master criminals we were introduced to the sniffer dog. I was swabbed for drugs by the security officers at Madrid airport.

Groan The €50.00 we were charged by Avis rentals to top up our returned rental car. The gauge was showing half full. I filled the car up a few days earlier, the gauge then showed between a quarter and empty, the cost then was €35.00!

Moan The cameras were a problem this trip, and I don't know why! I'm little more than a point & shoot merchant so I struggled to rectify the problems. The Nikon with the Sigma 600mm was the

biggest problem, it continually produced vastly over exposed shots even though I constantly changed the ISO and less frequently the shutter speeds. It also seemed to lose crisp focussing, with many blurred photos ensuing. The Canon with the 300mm lens wasn't really man enough for the many long distance shots we were presented with.

[Extremadura Trip List](#)

[Bird Photos](#)

Pat & Judy Hayes