

# Trip Report: Extremadura and Sierra de Gredos

April 21-28, 2019

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## Intro

My first trip to Extremadura proved to be a full success and was a lot of fun on top of it. I cashed in on the season and got almost all target birds of the area. Most are easy to find, if you take your time. Of course the weather has to cooperate.

One thing to note is that shorebirds and waterfowl are hard to come by, which explains why Extremadura lists typically aren't through the roof high.



## Highs, lows, notes

- Highs:
  - I did well on the sandgrouse and bustards. Spanish Eagle, Scops and Eagle Owl, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Roller and Temminck's Stint are always fun! Still can't believe that there were several Savi's Warblers at Arrocampo. Spectacled Warbler was my only lifer of the trip!
  - The Sierra de Gredos was a lot of fun! I enjoyed the area, but was maybe a little bit early in the year.
  - Favorite areas were La Serena, Arrocampo and Sierra de Gredos. Monfrague NP is a good place, but there were just too many people.
- Lows:
  - The weather was unpredictable. Rainy, windy and unbirdable on about 2 days. Ice on the window screen on 2 mornings. I underestimated the harshness of the days a little bit, but thanks to an extra day I was ok. Maybe it wouldn't be mistake to go a week or so later.
  - Misses included Bluethroat (they may not even have been here yet; well, I had no shot, I never made it up to their area), Black-eared Wheatear, Stone-Curlew and the dreadful Bonelli's Eagle. Shorebirds and ducks were hard to come by. Probably this is just how it is on this type of trip. I also never ended up finding an Iberian Chiffchaff.
  - I lost 2-3hrs in the high elevations at Sierra de Bejar/Gredos since I had to backtrack to pick up my bins that I had left behind at the bathroom at Arrocampo.
- Notes:
  - It was amazing how few people spoke English at all. Overall I was also amazed at how many birders and birding groups were working the area.
  - Internet was spotty at Hotel Lobriego in Plasenzuela. Grocery stores were also hard to find; I ended up shopping at E. LeClerc's in Trujillo.
  - Trujillo is neat: Just the right size, cute, good birding, and has everything you need.

## Daily account

### April 21: Monfrague NP

Didn't make it to Monfrague until about 10:30 am due to a delayed flight the night before. The main stops were



the viewpoints at Salto del Gitano and Portilla del Tiétar. I soon had seen all 3 vultures, Dartford and Subalpine Warbler, Red-rumped Swallow and Nightingale. At the Salto, I saw a couple of Black Storks at the cliff mingling with a boatload of Griffons. Rock Bunting and Blue Rock Thrush were also nice! There were many tourists and parking was essentially full. At the Tietar, I waited a long time for the Spanish Eagle to show up, but it did just as I was about to leave! An interaction with a Peregrine and a Griffon showed that the eagle really is the boss in the area.

Hotel Lobriego in Plasenzuela. Dinner was expensive and not that great, so I may skip this place. The hotel is ok, a little hard to reach initially. But once the logistics worked out, I was very happy with the small town atmosphere and the birds at the doorstep.

### **April 22: Jaraicejo, Arrocampo, a little bit of Trujillo plains**

At Jaraicejo, the first unusual thing was that I heard a Rock Sparrow sing from a tree. No rocks anywhere. A Red-legged Partridge was calling. Walking into the scrub, Thekla Lark and Dartford Warbler were easy. A Spectacled Warbler came in to playing the call, but never sang. Further along at the trees, a Western Orphean Warbler was singing non-stop. Iberian Gray and Woodchat Shrike were nearby as well.



Next up was Arrocampo Reservoir. It was superb! Several Savi's Warblers were singing from different areas! Melodious, Great Reed, European Reed were all singing as well. Little Bittern took a while to show up. Penduline Tits and Swamphens were easy. A Ferruginous Duck flew into the pond at shelter 2. Aerial assault was provided by several Gull-billed Terns, Black and Griffon Vultures.

I then went shopping at the Leclerc's in Trujillo and stopped by the bull ring to see the

Lesser Kestrel colony breeding in the roof.

The last 90 min I drove a short loop in the Trujillo plains. 6 Great Bustards were cool, one was displaying!. Several Rollers, many Calandra Larks, 2 perched-up Red-legged Partridge and both shrikes were all easy to see. Then I ran out of steam ...

The weather changed from sunny and 70s to low 50s at best. 3 days of rain to come.

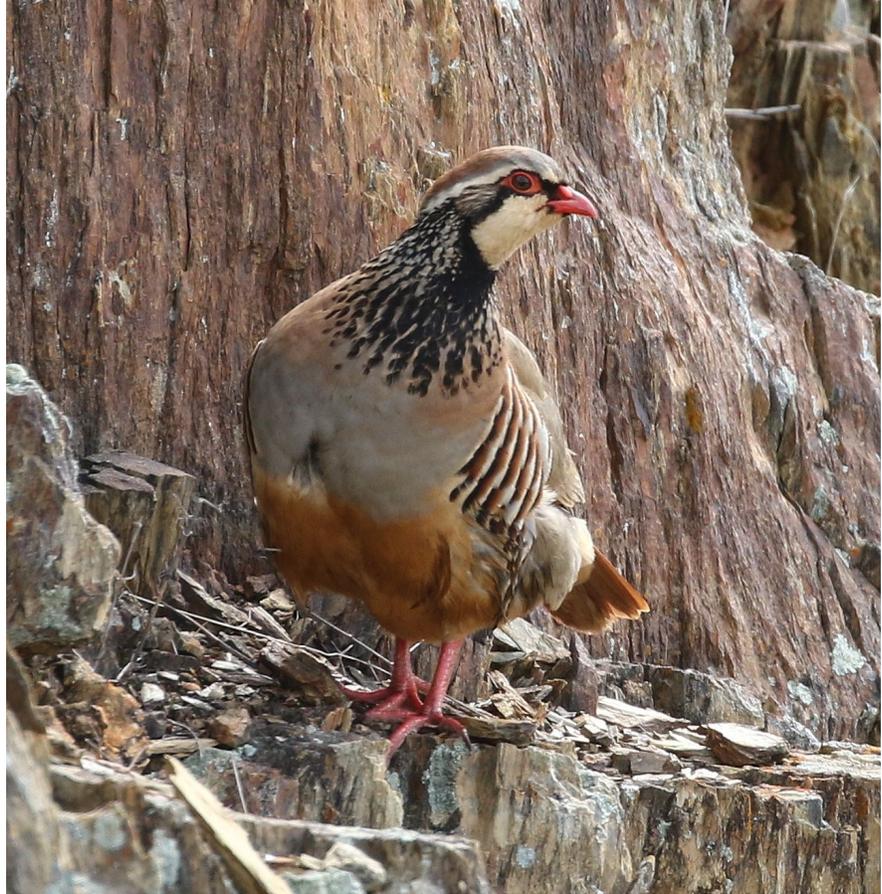
### **April 23: Campo Lugar, Vegas Altas, Serana Plains, Benquerencia**

I started at Campo Lugar for plains species. I immediately found a male Little Bustard on the way up to the rise. 15 Great Bustards including one displaying bird were also nearby. Heard a Black-bellied Sandgrouse, but couldn't hear it. On the rise were several Greater Short-toed Larks. Great place!

The Embalse de Sierra Brava was pretty much empty. Rollers were nearby and there also was a grounded Griffon on a pole.

The rice fields at Vegas Altas were a non-event. There were no flooded fields at all, so all I found were several Gull-billed Terns and a single Collared Pratincole.

Next up was La Serena ... At the spots 3 & 4 along the Cabeza road (see Gosney), I found 2 Little Bustards north of the intersection, many Black-bellied Sandgrouse in a sheep-grazed field west of the road at 4. 7 Great Bustard were very close to the road. The weather was horrible, with strong winds, lots of rain squalls, with temperatures between 7C and 11C.



The final stop was Benquerencia de la Serena, a neat little hilltop town in the Sierra de Tiros. The target was Black Wheatear and I found it. Also present were Blue Rock Thrush, Alpine Swift, Red-billed Chough and a singing Wren.

A pair of Rollers was again just south of Plasenzuela.

#### **April 24: Weathered out**

It was a horrible day out, with rain blasting sideways most of the time. The wind gusts were up to 30mph. I briefly went out to Valdesalor Reservoir in the morning, and found shorebirds, in

particular 2 Temminck's Stints and a Greenshank. There also were a few Egyptian Geese. Why Little Ringed Plover was flagged on eBird as rare is beyond me.

After getting gas, I decided to drive up to Hinojal to the Caceres plains, but found nothing but slick roads and unbirdable conditions. I returned to the hotel to do some bookkeeping. And try again tomorrow.

**April 25: Trujillo Plains, Belen Plains, Embalse de Guadiloba, Embalse de Valdesalor**



I revisited sites 1 and 2 in Gosney (the ones close to the A-58) early this morning. I immediately found Little and Great Bustard at 1, more of both at 2. I heard one Black-bellied Sandgrouse and finally laid my eyes on 3 Pin-taileds after they had been calling several times. Nice!

The river valley labeled as 3 was a fun little place to escape the wind. Highlights were Common Kingfisher, Crag Martin and Red-rumped Swallow.

I finally found a Little Owl, and a calling Quail at 5, but no sandgrouse. 2 Short-toed Eagles were a little further.

I walked the walled garden area near Belen with no success on the Great Spotted Cuckoo, then I dropped down onto the flats. A storm was coming, so the birds were hiding, except for a stream of raptors including all 3 vultures, Black Kite and Common Buzzard.

During a quick pit stop in Trujillo I got groceries and then tried to get close to the main plaza. Challenging! No place to park close by. And I never figured out how to get close to the castle.

I finished up with the embalses, the first one Guadiloba which was uneventful (the riparian area below the dam was good for passerines), then Valdesalor to look for the



Temminck's Stints again. Unfortunately, they had left, but it is still a nice place. 2 Greenshanks, 1 Common Redshank, Lesser Ringed Plovers, the continuing Egyptian Geese and a Common Kingfisher near the east end where the creek enters the reservoir.

#### **April 26: Near/in Trujillo, Monfrague NP, Serradilla**

Early morning I hit a spot about 1/2mi west of the intersection of CC128 & EX208 for Great Spotted Cuckoo. It was active, but at first no sign of magpies or cuckoos. Ended up seeing 2 flyovers, one really well, about another 1/2mi further west. There is a cool trail leaving from opposite a large pull out.



Then I scouted the Scops Owl spot near the castillo in Trujillo. First thing was another Great Spotted Cuckoo fly by. Then I found Pallid Swift (by call), Black Redstart and lots of other garden birds. Some decent looking trees for the owl.

Then back to Monfrague NP ... I first stopped by the Salto again and got the same birds as 5 days ago. No White-rumped Swifts yet. Then I took a lift up the castillo (and walked back). Pretty uneventful.

Next up was Serradilla. I enjoyed the peace with 3-4 butterfly species and a dragonfly near the pond that Gosney recommends to watch for Bonelli's Eagle. Melodious Warblers were singing, also Great Spotted Woodpecker, Robin, Rock Bunting and Dartford Warbler. The piney habitat looked good for Western Bonelli's Warbler, but it was just not a Bonelli type of day.

No luck with Bonelli's back along the main miradors. An Egyptian Vulture at the T mirador, a Black Vulture and the Spanish Eagle at the Tietar. I found a Rock Bunting nest on the ground right next to the blind, with babies in it. The Eagle Owl finally performed at 21:30.

On the way back to Trujillo I stopped a few times for Red-necked Nightjar, but heard nothing.

In Trujillo I found the Eurasian Scops Owl in the window of the tall tower! About 300yds from where I had been looking. :-)

#### **April 27: Arrocampo, a brief stint at Sierra de Bejar, Parador de Gredos, San Martin de Pimollar**

I slept in a little bit in the morning since it got late the night before. I birded Arrocampo Wetlands for 25min in the morning. It was pretty much a repeat of a few days ago, 2



Savi's were still duetting. The Melodious Warblers were gone - maybe they were migrants.

Onto the Sierra de Bejar ... I was almost there when I stopped for a bathroom break. This is where I discovered that I had left my bins at Arrocampo in the bathroom. I decided to bird the La Covatilla for an hour or so, without bins, before tracking back to Arrocampo. Dang it is hard without bins! There still was a lot of snow too! Dunnocks, Northern Wheatear, Black Redstart and Rock Buntings were common. Tawny Pipit was there too. I missed most everything else.

After the long drive back I finally got to the Parador de Gredos at 5:30pm. I immediately found a Citril Finch, later on another bright male would perch up for me. Coal Tit, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, heard-only Firecrest were all nice.

I checked into the hotel (Hostal Rural de Cuatro Calles) and went for a much needed leisurely walk. Lots of the common birds were present. I finally got a good look at Blackcap and 2 Long-tailed Tits were nice. A Green Woodpecker, *sharpei* I assume, was calling in the distance.

At night after dinner, I chatted with Juanfran who gave me some tips. He told me that Iberian Chiffchaff would be tough (he also mentioned a site near San Martin de Pimpollar for them at 40.352598, -5.053121, but I didn't have enough time to check it out). The folks at the Hostal Rural Quatro Calles are really nice and the dinner was home made and included wine and beer. Juanfran is a nature guide, leading trips for mushrooms, wildflowers, bugs and birds.

#### **April 28: Sierra de Gredos, trip back to Germany**



I opted to forego breakfast since I didn't have much time, so I started early on the lonely road from Navarredonda de Gredos (head south at the gas station towards their campground, then turn west to the Camping de Gredos). It was cold at 1C, but wherever the sun hit trees, it was pretty active. I enjoyed that there were NO cars at all for 2 hours. I found Firecrest, Crested and many Coal Tits, a Citril Finch, the everpresent Western Bonelli's Warbler, Gray Wagtails, European Pied Flycatcher, Red Crossbill and many Rock Buntings. No Iberian Chiffchaff however, and no White-throated Dipper along this "dippery" road.

Rather than trying harder for the chiffchaff, I opted to head up to Plataforma de Gredos.

Stops along the road first yielded several Yellow Wagtails, Rock Sparrow and Greater

Whitethroat. Then at the gate they charged me 3E, but it was well worth it. About a mile short of the final parking lot, 2 male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes were chasing each other in a territory dispute. Dunnock, Northern Wheatear and Rock Bunting were common. A couple of Ortolan Buntings were singing as well. Nice!

I hiked up a little ways the trail, but did not quite get to the area of a 6m high metal tower where the first Bluethroats can usually be found. One more male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush was singing, several close-up Ortolan Buntings and Dunslocks were quite visible. Then time came to turn back. Bummer! This was maybe my favorite area of the trip.

### **Species list (146 total):**

Egyptian Goose (Embalse de Valdesalor, Trujillo Plains)  
Mallard  
Northern Pintail (1 female at Moheda Alta)  
Ferruginous Duck (1 at Arrocampo, shelter 2)  
Common Quail (Campo Lugar, Trujillo Plains, Belen Plains)  
Red-legged Partridge (Trujillo Plains)  
Little Grebe  
Great Crested Grebe  
Rock Pigeon  
Common Wood-Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
Black-bellied Sandgrouse (many at La Serena)  
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse (3 at Trujillo Plains)  
Great Bustard (Trujillo Plains, Campo Lugar, La Serena)  
Little Bustard (Trujillo Plains, Campo Lugar, La Serena)  
Common Cuckoo  
Great Spotted Cuckoo (Trujillo, Berrocal Norte)  
Alpine Swift (Benquerencia de la Serena)  
Pallid Swift (Trujillo)  
Common Swift  
Eurasian Moorhen  
Eurasian Coot  
Western Swamphen (2 at Arrocampo)  
Black-winged Stilt  
Common Ringed Plover  
Little Ringed Plover  
Temminck's Stint (2 at Embalse de Valdesalor)  
Little Stint (3 at Moheda Alta)  
Dunlin  
Common Sandpiper

Common Greenshank  
Common Redshank (1 at Embase de Valdesalor)  
Collared Pratincole (1 at Vega Altas)  
Black-headed Gull  
Gull-billed Tern  
White Stork  
Black Stork (Monfrague NP - Salto and Tietar)  
Great Cormorant  
Little Bittern (2 at Arrocampo)  
Gray Heron  
Purple Heron (Arrocampo)  
Great Egret (Arrocampo and pond north of Trujillo)  
Little Egret  
Cattle Egret  
Black-crowned Night-heron (Arrocampo)  
Eurasian Spoonbill  
Egyptian Vulture (Monfrague NP)  
Cinereous Vulture  
Eurasian Griffon  
Short-toed Eagle (4 on Trujillo Plains)  
Booted Eagle  
Spanish Eagle (2 days at Mirador de Tietar, Monfrague NP)  
Eurasian Marsh-Harrier  
Montagu's Harrier (several at La Serena)  
Black Kite  
Red Kite  
Common Buzzard  
Eurasian Scops-Owl (Trujillo)  
Eurasian Eagle Owl (1 at Mirador de Tietar)  
Little Owl (1 near Magasca)  
Eurasian Hoopoe  
Common Kingfisher  
European Bee-eater  
European Roller (many at Trujillo Plains, 2 near Campo Lugar)  
Great Spotted Woodpecker  
Eurasian Green Woodpecker (1 head at San Martin de Pimpollar)  
Lesser Kestrel (Trujillo, Acedera)  
Eurasian Kestrel  
Peregrine Falcon  
Iberian Gray Shrike  
Woodchat Shrike  
Eurasian Jay  
Iberian Magpie

Eurasian Magpie  
Red-billed Chough (Benquerencia de la Serena)  
Eurasian Jackdaw  
Carrion Crow (Sierra de Gredos)  
Common Raven  
Greater Short-toed Lark (several at Zaida Plains)  
Calandra Lark  
Wood Lark (Sierra de Gredos)  
Eurasian Skylark (Sierra de Bejar, Platforma de Gredos)  
Thekla Lark  
Crested Lark  
Bank Swallow  
Eurasian Crag-Martin  
Barn Swallow  
Red-rumped Swallow  
Common House-Martin  
Coal Tit (many at Sierra de Gredos)  
Crested Tit (3 at Sierra de Gredos)  
Eurasian Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Eurasian Penduline Tit (Arrocampo with nest)  
Long-tailed Tit (Sierra de Gredos)  
Eurasian Nuthatch (1 at Parador de Gredos)  
Short-toed Treecreeper (Jaraicejo, Sierra de Gredos)  
Eurasian Wren (many at Sierra de Gredos)  
Common Firecrest (Sierra de Gredos)  
Cetti's Warbler  
Western Bonelli's Warbler (several at Sierra de Gredos)  
Melodious Warbler (Arrocampo, above Serradilla)  
Eurasian Reed Warbler (Arrocampo, Vega Altas)  
Great Reed Warbler (Arrocampo, Vega Altas)  
Savi's Warbler (5 at Arrocampo)  
Zitting Cisticola  
Eurasian Blackcap  
Western Orphean Warbler (Jaraicejo, Monfrague NP)  
Subalpine Warbler (Monfrague NP)  
Sardinian Warbler (closer to coast)  
Greater Whitethroat  
Spectacled Warbler (Jaraicejo)  
Dartford Warbler (Monfrague NP, Jaraicejo)  
European Robin (Serradilla, Sierra de Gredos)  
Common Nightingale  
European Pied Flycatcher (2 at Sierra de Gredos)

Black Redstart  
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (3 at Plataforma de Gredos)  
Blue Rock Thrush  
Whinchat (Arrocampo)  
European Stonechat  
Black Wheatear (1 at Benquerencia de la Serena)  
Northern Wheatear (many at high elevation)  
Eurasian Blackbird  
Spotless Starling  
Dunnock (Platforma de Gredos, Sierra de Bejar)  
Gray Wagtail (Sierra de Gredos)  
Western Yellow Wagtail (Sierra de Gredos)  
White Wagtail  
Tawny Pipit (2 at Sierra de Bejar)  
Common Chaffinch  
European Greenfinch  
Eurasian Linnet  
Red Crossbill (3 at Sierra de Gredos)  
European Goldfinch  
European Serin  
Citril Finch (3 at Sierra de Gredos)  
Corn Bunting  
Rock Bunting (many in several areas including a nest at Tietar viewpoint in Monfrague NP)  
Cirl Bunting (only 2 at Monfrague NP)  
Ortolan Bunting (many at Plataforma de Gredos)  
House Sparrow  
Spanish Sparrow  
Eurasian Tree Sparrow  
Rock Sparrow (Petronia) (Jaraicejo and Sierra de Gredos)  
Common Waxbill

**Other critters:**

Spanish Ibex  
Red Deer  
Red Squirrel  
Red Fox

**Butterflies:**

Spanish Festoon  
Red Admiral  
Gatekeeper



Green-veined White  
Painted Lady  
Brown Argus  
Holly Blue

**Dragonflies:**

Violet Dropwing  
Iberian Forktail  
Western Clubtail