

World

# Fugitive banknote forger ran errands for his elderly neighbours

Lucas Laursen, Madrid

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Manuel Bellido Moreno, 46, was wanted for distributing fake banknotes and had been on the run for more than seven years

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When the Madrid district of San Blas-Canillejas went into lockdown in 2020, a man who called himself El Lolo, (short for Manuel), offered to shop and do other errands

for old ladies confined to their homes.

His neighbourliness made him popular but when his face appeared last week in a list of Spain's most wanted fugitives, it was a neighbour who gave the police his address. The tip-off led to the arrest of Manuel Bellido Moreno, 46, who was wanted for distributing fake banknotes and had been on the run for more than seven years.

Bellido was arrested in 2014 in the [Galician town of Cambados](#). He was accused, with his wife, of handing out fake currency made by Rafael Velasco, a prolific forger known as “the pharaoh of counterfeit bills”. Velasco faked \$3.5 million dollars in \$50 and \$100 notes, as well as uncut sheets worth another \$20 million.

When Bellido was released on remand, however, he vanished. “He was the mastermind, the one who got away,” a police investigator told *El País*. The investigator said Bellido learnt the dark arts of counterfeiting from Velasco.

A court found Bellido guilty in his absence and sentenced him to nine years. A police investigator suspects him of having produced tens of thousands of fake €50 banknotes.

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In San Blas-Canillejas, meanwhile, a new upholsterer moved into a flat on Calle Tapiceria, named after the Spanish for upholstery. Bellido “fixed up furniture, upholstered chairs, put things together and earned some money that way,” according to a former neighbour.

During the pandemic Bellido, who had separated from his wife but lived with his two daughters, offered to run local errands or cook meals for those who could not leave their homes. Regulars at a bar near by told reporters that they saw him as a longstanding member of their community.

Bellido’s popularity was such that neighbours began throwing things at the police when they came to arrest him. Officers had to shelter in an entrance while they waited for back-up, according to local reports. Soon afterwards the man who called himself El Lolo began his jail sentence.

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At least he has done some good to atone for his past.

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