

TRIP TO EXTREMADURA – 16TH – 23RD NOVEMBER, 2010

The second Team of Molly Woolgar, Anna White, Lesley & Dennis Inkson, Gail & John McSweeney and Robert Wilson arrived just after 11 pm on Tuesday the 16th of November after meeting up at Schipol airport in Amsterdam. Molly, Anna & Robert had travelled from Edinburgh, Lesley & Dennis from Aberdeen and Gail & John from East Midlands. Our host, Martin Kelsey, had very kindly agreed to collect the Team on his own, which enabled me to have a whole day sussing out a local walk for the group. He also managed to change the Citroen Jumper, which had a couple of problems, and we ended up with a newer vehicle of the same model.



OUR ACCOMMODATION AT EL RECUERDO

It was so very unfortunate that our first morning was wet and misty! However, after our buffet breakfast on Wednesday the 17th, we put on the wet weather gear (including the odd brolly) and went out to experience the local area. Many of the birds we noted this morning were to be seen from the garden! These included **Azure-winged Magpies, Hoopoe, Spotless Starlings** and a couple of **Hawfinches** (which Molly could see from her window). We walked the 'B' trail in accordance with one of Martin's leaflets, and managed to add scores of **Blackcaps & Robins, Sparrowhawk, Collared Doves, Wren, Dunnock, Chiffchaffs, Black Redstart, Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Mistle Thrush,**

Redwing, Great Tits, Chaffinches and **Jay** as well as hearing **Red-legged Partridges**. A few of us had a view of an Iberian Hare, and I spotted a Fox jumping over a wall. One of the highlights was almost losing Molly as she had lingered behind the rest of us for a while, and did not see us turning left up a smaller track. It was thanks to John for noticing that she was missing, and that enabled Gail and I to go back to find her. She was never out of my sight after that!

We returned to El Recuerdo for one of Claudia's and Martin's lunches before heading out to the Belen Plain to the east of Trujillo in brightening skies, but with a cool breeze blowing. From our first stop, we spotted a group of 17 **Great Bustards**, and then walked along a track to have better views. I had a very quick view of a flock of around 40 **Little Bustards** as well, but we were unable to relocate them. We were made welcome at a farm by two very large Mastines, and watched a large finch/sparrow flock with **House, Spanish** and a single **Tree Sparrow**, around 100 **Goldfinches**, some **Greenfinches** and several **Linnets**. We reckoned in the afternoon that we had seen at least 80 **Corn Buntings**. **Lapwings** were fairly abundant with a few **Golden Plovers**, and we also observed 6 **Red Kites**, 2 **Common Buzzards**, 4 **Common Kestrels**, 2 **Hen Harriers**, around 80 **Griffon Vultures** and a single **Black** one. In the distance, we were able to spot a flight of 10 **Common Cranes**, and more closely, **Calandra, Crested, Sky** and one **Thekla Lark** as well as **Meadow Pipits, Sardinian Warbler, 3 Southern Grey Shrikes, Hoopoes, Stonechats, Common Magpies, 12 Jackdaws** and 2 **Ravens**.

Our last stop along this very quiet road was at a derelict farm to look for a possible Little Owl, but we spotted a **Black Redstart** instead. With the light starting to go, and folk feeling a little chilly, we headed back to base to get ready for our 7.30 pm meal but not before a stop at a filling station to top up our liquid intake!

At the meeting in the very cosy lounge with the log-burning fire, we did our bird list, noting that we had seen 52 species, and we were given an insight into what was to happen the next day when Martin outlined the plan whilst we sipped our liqueurs.

It was a fine day on Thursday the 18th as we met up with Martin, after we had finished our 8 am breakfast, and headed out to the west of Trujillo, this time to the Santa Marta de Magasca and Monroy areas. Our first stop in a fairly open area, with some scrub, produced **Southern Grey Shrikes, Stonechats, a Thekla Lark, Skylarks**, over 100 **Spanish Sparrows, Meadow Pipits** and a party of 30 **Little Bustards** which landed in an adjacent field. We motored a short distance up a brae for better views of these birds, and added a flock of around 80 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, as well as seeing better views of **Calandra Larks** and **Dartford Warbler**.

At the third stop in this 'dehesa' habitat, we could hear the distinctive song of **Woodlark**, spotted 5 **Common Cranes** in flight, saw several **Red Kites**, and watched a pair of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** landing. Although they were quite far away, we could just make out the black bellies through my new telescope.

Now, it was coffee time! This was spent in the square at Santa Marta de Magasca where some of us sat outside in the sun. Not too far out of this pretty

village, Martin spotted a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** sitting on a pylon near the Rio Almonte: so we pulled in and set up the telescopes. Whilst watching these birds perched then taking to flight, we also noted **Griffon Vultures, Black Redstarts, 3 Hawfinches, Crag Martin** and a pair of **Rock Sparrows**.

The sixth stop was after the long row of Roller nest boxes on telegraph poles when we pulled off the main road onto a track and stopped beside a small pond. Anna found an Iberian Pond Terrapin at the side of this water where we also added a **Green Sandpiper** and **White Wagtail**. At least 50 **Griffon Vultures** were on the wing, and some **Black Vultures** came quite close. **Red Kites** and **Common Buzzards** were also to the fore, and Martin spotted a pair of displaying **Golden Eagles**. A flock of **Lesser Black-backed & Black Headed Gulls** flew past, and Dennis spotted three **Common Starlings** on a wire.

Now it was time for lunch which was taken at the wonderful embalse near Talavan where we sat on the bridge whilst watching **Water Rail, Kingfisher, 2 Greenshanks, 4 Green Sandpipers, Common Sandpiper, 6 Common Snipe, 6 Little Egrets, 9 Little Grebes, 3 Cormorants, 7 Grey Herons, 20 Mallards, 15 Teal, 2 Shovelers, Marsh Harrier, Cetti's Warbler, Fan-tailed Warbler,** and a **Reed Bunting** as well as Otter, Small Copper, Clouded Yellows and Small Whites.



THE WONDERFUL LUNCHING SPOT AT TALAVAN

Apart from all this, when we stood up, Martin spotted three more displaying **Golden Eagles** amidst more **Griffon Vultures** and **Red Kites**! We went for a walk to have a better look at some of the waterfowl on the reservoir, and Gail spotted a beautiful Praying Mantis. From here, we drove to another bridge over the Rio Almonte and went for a walk, spotting 2 **Green Sandpipers**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Grey Heron**, **Grey Wagtail**, **White Wagtail**, **Black Redstart** and **Chiffchaffs** feeding in the warm sunshine in the Ratama bushes.

Our ninth stop, with Trujillo in sight, was opposite a ruined building on which Martin & I had seen a **Little Owl** with the first group, and lo and behold it was there for us again! The last stop was on the outskirts of Trujillo at an artists' shop in the hope of finding a sketchpad for Anna.

We arrived back at El Recuerdo at 1815, allowing us plenty of time to get ready for another of Claudia's lovely meals. At the meeting by the fire, we noted that we had come across 83 bird species in two days.

Martin was very happy to lead us again on Friday the 19th, after we had a look at the Stripe-less Tree Frogs in the large pot by the front door, and we headed out to Zorita, then south towards Campo Lugar and on to the rice fields. Rain had been threatening but came to nothing. The rice fields were wonderful with the sight and sound of thousands of **Common Cranes** plus **Kingfisher**, **Avocets**, **Green Sandpipers**, **Common Snipe**, 15 **Black-winged Stilts**, **Lapwings**, **Kentish Plovers**, 6 **Dunlins**, 2 **Squacco Herons**, **Little Bittern**, **Grey Herons**, 20 **White Storks**, **Stonechats**, **Corn Buntings**, **Spanish Sparrows** and glimpses of the odd **Red Avadavat** and **Common Waxbill** at the side of the road.



COMMON CRANES IN THE RICE FIELDS

Lesley was keen to have even better views of her favourite **Kingfisher**: so we stopped at a river area and went for a short walk. Some of us had glimpses of this speedy bird, and also heard **Cetti's Warbler** and saw hundreds of **Cattle Egrets**, as well as **Griffon Vultures, Hen Harrier & Merlin** plus better views of **Red Avadavats & Common Waxbills** amongst the American Poke-weed.

From here, we headed to the Crane Centre, but made a wonderful stop to have great views of a beautiful **Black-shouldered Kite** flying to and from a telegraph wire. This was one of the highlights for some people. The Centre was very quiet, and we ate Martin's packed lunches al fresco whilst listening to **Red-legged Partridges**. The girl in the Centre once again supplied some information for us before we headed further along the road to a viewing platform overlooking the rice fields. Hundreds more **Cranes** along with 30 **Greylag Geese, Spoonbill, Marsh Harriers, Common Buzzards, Common Kestrels, Grey Herons, Little & Cattle Egrets, Common Snipe, Reed Bunting** and more **White Storks**. I managed to see a pair of Otters running along one of the raised banks.

From here, we drove back along the muddy track and parked beside another viewing area, and walked to a reservoir to see **Mallard, Pintail** and **Gadwall** before looking in the adjacent vegetation for more **Red Avadavats & Common Waxbills** as well as **Fan-tailed Warblers**.

As there was still some time left before we were due back at base, we popped in to have a look at the Embalse de Sierra Brava where there can be around 100,000 waterfowl. We saw hundreds of **Mallards, Teal, Gadwall, Wigeon** and **Shoveler** plus **Little Grebe, 20 Great Crested Grebes, 25 Cormorants, 30 Greylag Geese, 40 Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, scores of **Black-headed Gulls** and **White Wagtails**.

From this point, we motored slowly along the Campo Lugar road and saw 30 **Golden Plovers, Crested Larks, Corn Buntings, House Sparrows, Southern Grey Shrikes, Stonechats** and 3 **Ravens** plus a lovely **Little Owl** on another old building. During the day, we had seen at least 200 **Collared Doves**.

We arrived back at El Recuerdo at 1815 allowing over an hour to get ready for dinner. Some of us had a cup of tea in the lounge beforehand, and at the nightly meeting, we noted that we had seen over 100 bird species for the holiday so far.

Martin was keen to have the damp & misty Saturday the 20th off: so I took the Team onto the Madrid motorway, off at Almaraz and over to the Embalse de Arrocampo where we met up with a group from Naturetrek. This was not as bad as it sounds as one of the ladies came over to us, at one point, to tell us that they had found a **Purple Gallinule** with two young. The weather by now had improved greatly but with a stiff breeze blowing. We borrowed the key for the hides and walked around spotting **Kingfisher, Stonechats, Meadow Pipits, Common Magpies, Kestrel, Common Sandpiper**, more **Gallinules, Moorhens, Coots, Grey Herons, Marsh Harriers** and **Cormorants**. Anna spotted a very distant **White Stork** on its nest, I had a glimpse of another Fox, and we all saw Clouded Yellows. We drove round to hide number 5 and sat at the water's edge to have our picnic lunches, after which we took a short stroll

seeing 20 **Stock Doves**, more **Cattle Egrets**, **Stonechats**, **Goldfinches**, **Chiffchaffs**, several **Griffon Vultures**, against a magnificent snowy mountain backdrop, and a flock of **Jackdaws** harassing a **Common Buzzard**.



LUNCHING SPOT AT THE ARROCAMPO EMBALSE

After returning the hide key, we eventually found our way onto the road leading to Valdecanas de Tajo where we went for a stroll up a valley after chatting to a local who was conducting a wildlife survey. This valley was fairly quiet apart from the cliff area full of **Griffon Vultures** with the odd **Black** one but we also saw **Sparrowhawk**, **Hawfinches**, **Blackcaps**, **Robins**, **Song Thrushes**, **Mistle Thrush** and **Chaffinches**.

Because there was not too much to be seen here, we returned early to El Recuerdo where most of us went for a local walk adding **Azure-winged Magpies** and **Redwings** plus having good views of **Hoopoe**. We bumped into Lesley during one of her jogs whilst many of the locals were heading to the church for mass. At our extremely comfortable evening get-together, we looked at the array of coffee table books, and noted that our bird list stood at 105 species.

It was Martin's turn once more to lead us on Sunday the 21st when we headed into the hills around Cabanas de Castillo. It was a cool, cloudy day with the threat of some rain. Our first stop was at yet another bridge over the

River Almonte where we watched a small party of **Siskins, Grey Wagtail** and **Griffon Vultures** before stopping just short of the village of Cabanas de Castillo as Martin had spotted some **Cirl Buntings**. We managed to see four of these plus four **Mistle Thrushes, Serins** and three distant **Greylag Geese**.

We parked just outside the village and went for a walk seeing several cats, **Blue Rock Thrushes, Black Redstarts, Blackcaps, Greenfinches, Chaffinches, Great, Blue & Long-tailed Tits, Crag Martins, 2 Rock Sparrows, Jay** and **2 Ravens**. A little further along the road, we pulled in by the side of the road and went for a walk in this Cork Oak woodland area, spotting **Short-toed Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Blackbirds** and **Song Thrushes** plus hearing a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. I elected to return for the minibus, and missed out on **Firecrest** and **Crested Tit!**

However, I did not miss out on the 4 displaying **Golden Eagles** with two **Peregrines, Kestrel** and a **Sparrowhawk** at our roadside lunching spot! As usual, **Griffon Vultures** were drifting past at the same time.

The rain was starting to fall as we parked the minibus in the village of Berzocana where we had a coffee stop before heading uphill for a woodland walk but by this time the rain was very heavy, and the walk was curtailed.

The plan now was to head for the Belen Plain where we hoped the weather would be better. En route, we spotted a **Merlin**, and very unfortunately found a dead Otter by the roadside. As we drove through some quaint little villages, we could see the brighter skies ahead, and by the time we reached the Belen Plain, the clouds had cleared. As we drove along the narrow, quiet road, flocks of **Corn Buntings, Linnets, Spanish & House Sparrows** as well as **Southern Grey Shrikes** and **Hoopoes** took off from the ditches and fences before we stopped just short of the village of Belen where we watched 6 **Great Bustards** and a **Little Owl** spotted by Gail. She was very keen to see large flocks of roosting **Spotless Starlings**: so we stopped just outside Trujillo to watch some flocks heading towards the town. We even went into the town to see and listen to them amongst the vegetation.

We managed to return to El Recuerdo with one hour to spare before the 7.30 pm dinner which we all enjoyed as usual along with the complementary wine, and at the evening meeting we noted that the bird list now stood at 115.

For our last full day on Monday the 22nd, I took the Team to the Monfrague National Park to the north of Trujillo on a warm and not too cloudy day with virtually no wind. Our first stop was at a bridge over the Rio Almonte with the morning mist slowly rising. The river produced a **Grey Wagtail, White Wagtail, 2 Common Snipe** and 3 **Green Sandpipers** whilst **Jackdaws** clacked from the bridge. In the immediate area, we also watched **Southern Grey Shrike, Stonechats, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Serins** and **Black Redstart**. Lesley noticed a movement on the other side of the river, which was another grey Fox.

As we still had a long day ahead of us, we headed further into the National Park and up to the castle where we had magnificent views of the surrounding countryside, including the reservoir, and scores of wheeling **Griffon Vultures** as well as **Hawfinches, Black Redstarts, Crag Martins, Robins, Song Thrushes, Blackcaps** and **Blue Rock Thrushes**. In the warmth, we spotted Small Whites, Small Copper and a Red Admiral.

Our next stop was at one of the nesting sites for the vultures, Penafalcon, where we watched scores of **Griffons** on the cliffs and wheeling around. Other



ONE OF THE MANY GRIFFON VULTURES AT MONFRAGUE

birds seen here were **Long-tailed Tits**, **Short-toed Treecreeper** (spotted by Molly), **Crag Martins** and **Black Redstarts**. We stood at the viewing platform, with school children not too far away, and enjoyed the lovely views but our tummies were starting to rumble: so it was time to head for the picnic spot. This was by a long bridge with some sunlight just glinting through the trees, and we had **Feral Pigeons** for company.

After this, we headed for Villarreal de San Carlos for a coffee break before heading further through Red Deer country to a Pine forest at the far end of the reservoir where we went for a walk finding **Crested Tits**, **Long-tailed Tits**, **Firecrest**, **Goldcrest**, **Azure-winged Magpies** and a **Hawfinch** feeding on the pine cones.

The final stop was at the known Eagle Owl site with another viewing platform and hide, and here we watched many more **Griffon Vultures**, 2 **Blue Rock Thrushes**, **Jays**, **Kingfisher** and a **Great Crested Grebe**. Anna had a quick glimpse of a **Dartford Warbler**. We met a couple here who were going to wait in the hope of seeing an Eagle Owl, but when we were heading for the airport the following day, we learned that they had not seen any. Almost back at the Pinewoods, we had a very close view of yet another Fox.

Once back at base, and after another fine meal, we sat in the cosy lounge for the last time of the holiday, noting that our bird list now stands at 118 which is exactly the same number as the previous week. Taking both weeks into consideration, the overall total was 125.



THE LAST SUPPER

On Tuesday the 23rd of November, it was a fairly leisurely start to the morning with people having breakfast when they wished as long as we could get on the road by 11 am. Some people came for a walk with me to see the local species for the last time such as **Hoopoe, Azure-winged Magpie, Spotless Starling, Blackcap, Chiffchaff** and **Redwing**. How we missed Lesley on her final jog, I will never know!

After saying “goodbye” to Claudia & Moro, (Patrick had popped in at breakfast to say “farewell”) we were able to spot some flights of **Common Cranes** as we headed out on the motorway towards Madrid. We stopped at a café cum filling station to top up the fuel tank, and to have our final packed lunch al fresco before reaching the airport with plenty of time for our flight back to Schipol. Lesley, Dennis, Gail & John said their quick “farewells” as they had less time to catch their flights but the rest of us had plenty of time to relax before heading back to Edinburgh which we reached in good time.

For me, it was a great two weeks, and thanks to all concerned, especially Martin & Claudia. The weather was pretty kind to us although it could have been a little warmer, and the company was great. Here’s hoping that we can meet up again for another adventure. Russell G Nisbet – January, 2011.