

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo
REPORT ON AUTUMN HOLIDAY FOR ANDY AND PHYLLIS
Itinerary (26th October – 31st October 2014)

26th October 2014: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo with stop at Arrocampo.

27th October 2014: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Trujillo.

28th October 2014: Plains of Campo Lugar, Acollarín Reservoir and the rice fields near Palazuelo.

29th October 2014: Monfragüe National Park

30th October 2014: Plains of Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and the Pico de Villuercas.

31st October 2014: Return to Madrid.

Trip Report



Day 1: 26th October 2014

It was perfect timing as Andy and Phyllis arrived at 10.00 on the dot at Terminal Four of Madrid airport, following their short break in Madrid, the *rendez-vous* with Martin. Within minutes we were heading from the airport, travelling around the southern edge of Madrid in warm autumn sunshine, before reaching the A5 motorway heading south-westwards towards Extremadura. We crossed first the rather dry-looking arable plains of Castile La Mancha, before getting closer to the impressive Gredos Mountains and the *dehesa* landscape with holm oaks. We stopped for refreshments about an hour and a half into the journey, and then left the motorway once we were in Extremadura to spend the afternoon in the vicinity of the Arrocampo reservoir. We had an initial stop for our picnic overlooking the Charca Salada, south-west of Casatejadas. It was a tranquil spot, with a small old reservoir surrounded by holm oak *dehesa*. The shallow end of the pool hosted three species of **egret** as well as **Mallard**, **Teal** and many **Cormorants**. A raft of **Little Grebe** also gathered in the centre of the water body. Whilst we had lunch, **vultures** took advantage of the thermals, circling close by along with a couple of **Red Kite**. It was an excellent opportunity to study the differences between the **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**.

From here we returned to Saucedilla, stopping at the outskirts of the village to enjoy good views of **Spanish Sparrows**, a **Rock Sparrow**, **Stonechat** and a **Black Redstart**. Close to the village is the Arrocampo reservoir where we made three stops beside the fringing vegetation of reeds and *Typha*. **Purple Swamphens** gave their toy trumpet calls and we had views of these odd-looking birds as they walked, swam and flew. Two **Chiffchaffs** fed on tiny insects on a chain-link fence, whilst just in front of us, **House** and **Spanish Sparrows**, **Spotless Starlings** and **Common Waxbills** came down to bathe in a large puddle. The second stop was especially productive. Just as we arrived we located a feeding group of **Penduline Tits** and enjoyed prolonged views of one male in particular. Just minutes later a fleeting glimpse of a male **Bluethroat** was followed by the luxury of outstanding views of at least two males mobbing an unseen threat (perhaps a cat), their alarm calls attracted other birds and within seconds six to eight **Chiffchaffs** were present as well as a couple of **Zitting Cisticolas**. The **Bluethroats** stole the show though, perched high on *Typha* stems, flicking their tails and giving alarm calls.

We made a final stop to look for dragonflies but the afternoon was coming to an end, the sun was getting lower and the temperature gradually dropping. Apart from a hawk seen briefly in flight, we failed to find any other species, so we decided to head onwards on the final leg of the journey, reaching Casa Rural El Recuerdo shortly after 17.00.

Day 2: 27th October 2014

A fine sunny morning and it developed into a wonderfully warm and calm day. After breakfast we headed west of the nearby town of Trujillo, stopping first of all at a transition zone between *dehesa* woodland and open country. To the east stood Trujillo atop its granite batholith. Whilst to the north we could see the shape of the

Gredos Mountains, about 100 km away. **Corn Buntings** were much in evidence as were **Lapwings**, whilst we had good views of a nearby **Crested Lark**. Just a short distance further along the road we stopped again and here we were able to get good views of two **Thekla Lark**, whilst a **Woodlark** sang in the background. A **Dartford Warbler** teased us with brief glimpses, but more satisfying was the appearance of a **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** which flew in, dropping like a stone to settle in the field in front of us. We took a drive on a dirt road through the plains. Two **Northern Wheatears** settled on the fences, along with **Stonechats** and the almost ubiquitous **Corn Buntings**. Stopping to scan we spotted a dispersed group of 25 **Little Bustard**, rather distant and superbly camouflaged in tall dry vegetation. Not that far away were two **Great Bustards**, so we had a good opportunity to compare the two species. A second **Dartford Warbler** came into view and this time it delighted us by perching on the fence beside us.



We returned to the road and headed in the direction of Santa Marta de Magasca, seeing a close-up female **Hen Harrier** as well as several **Azure-winged Magpies**. It was market day in the village, but we found a place to park and enjoyed refreshments in the busy little village bar.

Afterwards we took a view over the River Tamuja valley before then stopping beside the River Magsaca for our picnic. **Crag Martins** wheeled around us, but most spectacular was a movement of large birds of prey starting with **Red Kite**, with a

very late **Black Kite**, **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, and peaking with magnificent views of sky-dancing **Golden Eagle**. Following the spectacle above our heads, we decided to take a short walk beside the river, seeing a **Kingfisher** and also finding a couple of dragonfly species.

We returned to the open plains and stopped when we potted a juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** passing in low flight in front of us, and then settling on a rock, with a food item. We watched it until it hopped out of view, whilst in the meantime **Red Kites** and **Griffon Vultures** were gathering. A **Golden Eagle** made a brief appearance and then an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** soared into view, the sun catching the brilliant white leading edge to the wing. Gradually the birds departed and for a moment the sky was empty...until the juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** returned, crop full, soaring in front of us.

We then took a short walk onto a drovers trail nearby and watched a **Calandra Lark** singing without a break during the whole of our stay, from a fence post in front of us. A **Zitting Cisticola** also provided excellent views, whilst a small group of about a dozen wintering **Stock Dove** flew in to land on a ploughed field.

As the afternoon was closing, we headed to Trujillo, seeing a pair of **Common Kestrel** on route. Parking near the Main Square we walked around the old medieval part of town, seeing the palaces built on the wealth of conquest as well as the earlier fortified places from the era of wool wealth and feuds. **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Crag Martins** perched together in the Main Square, whilst we were pleased to watch a **Hoopoe** calling from atop of one of the ancient stone buildings.

Day 3: 28th October 2014

It was another warm and fine day, although with a thin layer of high cloud most of the time. Before breakfast, a **Hawfinch** fed on dried grapes hanging on the vine in front of the house, in wonderful morning light. We headed southwards to start the day exploring the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. At our very first stop we obtained good views of a small group of **Great Bustard**, standing in good light on the brow of a stubble field, their richly marked upperparts nicely on show. In the same field on a pile of stones stood a cross-looking **Little Owl**. Onwards across the plain we had other sightings of **Great Bustard** and a brief and poor view of a **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. Larks however were much more obliging, with prolonged close views of **Thekla** and **Crested Larks**, and nice studies of **Calandra** and **Woodlark** in flight. Far off in the distance, a **Golden Eagle** sat on top of a pylon. **Lapwings** seemed everywhere and we also found two **Golden Plover**.

On two pools we found throngs of duck, drawing the attention of a **Marsh Harrier**. Amongst the **Mallard**, **Teal** and **Shoveler** we found a few **Gadwall**, **Pintail** and a male **Tufted Duck** as well.



After coffee, we went to the recently completed Alcollarín reservoir. Its banks had a nice collection of herons and egrets, including at least 15 **Great White Egret**, a **Black Stork** and seven **Spoonbill**. From a high viewpoint we could watch an extraordinary cluster of 70 or 80 **Little Grebe**, perhaps 40 **Great Crested Grebe** and a couple of **Black-necked Grebe**, diving after small fish, whilst **Black-headed Gulls** hovered overhead.

We had picnic next to a weir and a small pool, where again herons and egrets clustered on the banks, constantly being disturbed by a marauding **Marsh Harrier**. Here dragonflies, mainly **Red-veined Darters** but also a **Violet Drogwing** were much in evidence.

After lunch we went back southwards, passing again the village of Campo Lugar where we stopped to watch a male **Lesser Kestrel** on an old silo building. From there we dropped to the rice fields where harvest was well underway. Some of the stubble fields were being ploughed, with the churned-up mud providing excellent feeding opportunities for egrets and gulls. The resulting muddy fields were attractive to waders as well and we saw 14 species in total, including good numbers of **Wood Sandpipers**, **Snipe** and **Ringed Plovers**, as well as a few **Kentish Plovers**, **Little Stint** and **Ruff**. Small parties of **Common Crane** were evident, but particular pleasing was a good view of a family of four: two adults and two juveniles, their heads a warm fawn colour. The colours of the ripe rice fields were enhanced by a low late afternoon sun, and as we climbed back up to the plains on our way back

home, a group of four **Great Bustard** could be seen whilst a **Little Owl** perched atop a pile of stones in the middle of a field.

Day 4: 29th October 2014



Cloudless skies greeted us again today and we headed north, through Trujillo and then through a vast *dehesa* landscape, with holm oak wood pasture extending as far as the eye could see. Monfragüe National Park is a series of metamorphosed sandstone ridges, running east to west, through which cuts the Tajo River and its tributary the Tiétar. We stopped first of all opposite the vast cliff of Peña Falcon, beside the Tajo, the longest river in the Iberian Peninsula. On the rock face **Griffon Vultures** rested, whilst others were airborne, **Black Vultures** also passed with their immense rectangular form. The sky was also full of **Crag Martins**. After feasting our eyes at this spot, we then drove through the park to visit the viewpoint at the Portilla del Tiétar. On the way we had a wonderful view of a fine **Red Deer** stag, as well as some females. At the viewpoint, where magnificent rock formations rose above the water, we could watch **vultures** at close quarters, but we did not have to wait long before a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** appeared soaring beside the vultures. As we watched, vultures came into land, the sound of air rushing through their feather being easily audible. We also had views of **Blue Rock Thrush**, whilst a party of **Common Crane** also circled above, giving their evocative bugling call.

We then took refreshments at a small bar beside a *dehesa* of cork oak trees, before back-tracking through the park, stopping at a picnic area with pine trees. We took a short walk, and were rewarded with superb views of a **Firecrest**. After lunch we continued back through the park, stopping to admire the geology and then taking another walk beside the River Tajo, largely in the shade of the *umbria* mixed woodland. **Robins** were very common here, as were **Blackcaps** and parties of **titmice**. We concluded the day by walking up to the castle where we not only had breath-taking views of the scenery but also incredible sightings of passing vultures. Particularly memorable though were the **Griffon Vultures** on the rock face below the castle, where a begging juvenile was making a hoarse donkey-like braying, whilst **Griffon Vultures** swooped down, landing with great whooshes of air.

Day 5: 30th October 2014

For our final full day in Extremadura we could not have asked for better weather: a cloudless sky, little or no wind and warm sunshine. We started the morning with a return visit to the plains south of the town of Zorita where we completed our mission to get better views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, with an initial group of four and then a pair seen in flight. The views were rather distant, but prolonged and good enough to see the black belly contrasting strongly with the white wing linings, and we could also appreciate their rather rich brown upperparts.

Two **Little Owls** were also seen and a party of **Little Bustard** in flight, which disappeared almost completely from view once they landed in wheat stubble. From there we dropped down to the irrigated lands near the town of Madrigalejo. We stopped to check out a Stone Curlew roost, but frustratingly a man was exercising dogs over the area and most of the **Stone Curlews** were seen distantly in flight. One did come down to land fairly close by but not for long enough to view through the telescope. We went on to another roosting area which had, unfortunately, been very recently dug over, so no birds were present.

We then visited the Crane Information Centre at Moheda Alta, seeing the exhibition and then having a very pleasant walk through the *dehesa* towards the viewing areas for cranes. All of the time small groups of **Common Cranes** were passing over calling, a wonderful sight against the blue sky.



We also came across a very obliging **Hoopoe**, which sat enjoying the sun. There was a newly constricted hide at the edge of the *dehesa* looking across onto the recently harvested rice fields. From there we had excellent views of several groups of cranes.

Returning through the *dehesa*, we were fortunate enough to see a **Black-winged Kite** mobbing a **Red Kite**, as well as two other **Red Kites**. We elected to have our picnic at the edge of the woodland and then paid a visit to a small pool just to the north. This provided very productive with a good range of waterfowl, including **Ferruginous Duck**, **Red-crested Pochard**, **Common Pochard**, **Greylag Geese** and **Egyptian Geese**. But perhaps most memorable was a tree which seemed almost alive with **Chiffchaffs**. There must have been a dozen or more feeding, gleaning leaves and making aerial sallies.



We then headed north for a complete change of scenery, ascending the Villuercas Mountains north of Guadalupe. Taking an old narrow road, we rose initially through forested area of pines, and then plantations of sweet chestnut before getting into native belts of Pyrenean Oak. Just a couple of kilometres from the start, at a sharp bend we put up a party of about 20 finches from the ground. They flew into the trees and for a period were very hard to relocate. Luckily, with patience, we were able to watch some fly into open trees just in front of us. They were **Citril Finches**, a very rare bird indeed in Extremadura. Most of them were adult males and we could see clearly their yellowish bellies, olive green breasts, greyish napes and bold yellow wingbars. They also produced fairly continuously a short, rather nasal call which was quite distinctive. Very pleased with this surprise, we continued the drive up to the peak of the Villuercas Mountains, at 1600 metres above sea-level. The views were the top were breath-taking and we simply enjoyed soaking in both the scenery and the sunshine. The only distractions were a few **Black Redstarts**, otherwise the biggest impression was that of silence with a clear blue sky devoid even of vapour trails of aircraft.

We descended from the peak by a different route, past huge scree slopes where the scree was made up of boulders. We stopped at a small pass, affording us good views across to the high peak and then returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, via the towns of Cañamero and Logrosán.

Day 6: 31st October 2014

We left just before 06.00 for the return to Madrid airport, with a stop for breakfast just before the halfway point. Most of the journey was before dawn, but it was getting light we passed the last storks' nests en route, at about 100 kilometres from Madrid, with single roosting **White Storks** on each one of them.

Annotated List of Species Seen

Birds

1. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Charca Salado on 26th and at Alcollarín on 28th October.
2. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Charca Salado and Arrocampo on 26th and at Alcollarín on 28th October.
3. **Black-necked Grebe**: One or two at Alcollarín Reservoir on 28th October.
4. **Great Cormorant**: Seen most days.
5. **Cattle Egret**: Seen most days.
6. **Little Egret**: Seen at Charca Salado, Arrocampo and Alcollarín reservoirs and on the rice fields on 28th October.
7. **Great Egret**: Seen at Charca Salado and Arrocampo on 26th and at Alcollarín on 28th October, where at least 15 present.
8. **Grey Heron**: Seen most days.
9. **Black Stork**: One at Alcollarín reservoir on 28th October.
10. **White Stork**: Seen on the rice fields and on return to Madrid.
11. **Spoonbill**: Seven seen at Alcollarín on 28th October.
12. **Grey Lag Goose**: About 12 present at Moheda Alta pool on 30th October.
13. **Egyptian Goose**: 17 at Moheda Alta pool on 30th October.
14. **Gadwall**: Seen at Arrocampo, on pools near Campo Lugar and at Moheda Alta.
15. **Teal**: Seen at Charca Salada, Alcollarín, on pools near Campo Lugar and at Moheda Alta.
16. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
17. **Pintail**: Two on pools near Campo Lugar on 28th October.
18. **Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín, on pools near Campo Lugar and at Moheda Alta.
19. **Red-crested Pochard**: One male at Moheda Alta pool on 30th October.

20. **Common Pochard:** About 70 at Moheda Alta pool on 30th October.
21. **Tufted Duck:** One male on pool near Campo Lugar on 28th October.
22. **Ferruginous Duck:** A female at Moheda Alta pool on 30th October.
23. **Black-winged Kite:** One mobbing a Red Kite at Moheda Alta on 30th October.
24. **Black Kite:** One over Magasca River on 27th October.
25. **Red Kite:** Seen almost daily.
26. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
27. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
28. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
29. **Hen Harrier:** An adult female seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 27th October.
30. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
31. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** An adult and a juvenile seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 27th October and an adult in Monfragüe on 29th October.
32. **Golden Eagle:** A displaying adult over Magasca River on 27th October, and another seen later that day, and an adult on plains near Campo Lugar on 28th.
33. **Lesser Kestrel:** An adult male near Campo Lugar on 28th October.
34. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
35. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen and or heard on several days.
36. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo Reservoir.
37. **Common Coot:** Present on all large water bodies.
38. **Common Crane:** Seen on both visits to rice fields, with several hundred present on 30th October at Moheda Alta. A group also seen over Monfragüe.
39. **Little Bustard:** 25 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 27th October and 12 near Campo Lugar on 30th October.
40. **Great Bustard:** Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 27th October, about 20 seen on Campo Lugar plains on 28th October and four there on 30th October.
41. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on rice fields on 28th October.
42. **Stone Curlew:** About six seen at Madrigalejo on 30th October.
43. **Ringed Plover:** About ten seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.
44. **Little Ringed Plover:** About eight seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.
45. **Kentish Plover:** About four seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.

46. **Golden Plover:** Two on Campo Lugar plains on 28th October
47. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen daily and in good numbers on the plains and rice fields.
48. **Dunlin:** About 40 seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.
49. **Little Stint:** About ten seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.
50. **Ruff:** About five seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.
51. **Common Snipe:** Good numbers on the rice fields and also at Arrocampo.
52. **Black-tailed Godwit:** One at Moheda Alta pool on 30th October.
53. **Spotted Redshank:** One or two near Palazuelo on 28th October.
54. **Common Redshank:** About 12 seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.
55. **Greenshank:** About four seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.
56. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen most days.
57. **Wood Sandpiper:** About ten seen near Palazuelo on 28th October.
58. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Charca Salado and Moheda Alta.
59. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on rice fields.
60. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on rice fields.
61. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** One seen on 28th October and about six on 30th October on Campo Lugar plains.
62. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** One seen on plains west of Trujillo on 27th October.
63. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
64. **Stock Dove:** Party of about 12 on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 27th October.
65. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
66. **Collared Dove:** Seen almost daily.
67. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains near Campo Lugar.
68. **Kingfisher:** Seen on several days.
69. **Hoopoe:** Seen on several days.
70. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard in Monfragüe.
71. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo and near Campo Lugar.
72. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
73. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.

74. **Woodlark:** Seen or heard almost daily.
75. **Skylark:** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and near Campo Lugar.
76. **Crag Martin:** Seen on several days.
77. **Barn Swallow:** One at Monfragüe on 29th October.
78. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Two in Trujillo on 27th October.
79. **House Martin:** About five seen at Monfragüe on 29th October.
80. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
81. **Water Pipit:** One near Saucedilla on 26th October.
82. **Grey Wagtail:** One on River Magasca on 27th October and one at Monfragüe on 29th October.
83. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
84. **Wren:** Heard on a couple of days.
85. **Dunnock:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains on 30th October.
86. **Robin:** Seen daily.
87. **Bluethroat:** Two males at Arrocampo on 26th October.
88. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
89. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
90. **Northern Wheatear:** Two near Santa Marta de Magasca on 27th October and one near Campo Lugar on 28th October.
91. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
92. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
93. **Song Thrush:** Seen on several days.
94. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
95. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded almost daily.
96. **Zitting Cisticola.** Seen on most days.
97. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 27th October, Alcollarín and Villuercas Mountains.
98. **Sardinian Warbler:** Heard daily.
99. **Blackcap:** Seen on several days.
100. **Chiffchaff:** Seen every day in good numbers.

101. **Firecrest:** One or two seen in Monfragüe on 29th October.
102. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen in Monfragüe.
103. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
104. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
105. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Heard in Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
106. **Penduline Tit:** A party at Arrocampo on 26th October.
107. **Southern Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Jay:** Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains
109. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
110. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
111. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
112. **Raven:** Seen almost every day.
113. **Common Starling:** Several seen at Alcollarín and Campo Lugar plains on 28th October.
114. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
115. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
116. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on several days.
117. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields on 28th October.
118. **Rock Sparrow:** One seen near Saucedilla on 26th October.
119. **Common Waxbill:** A pair at Saucedilla on 26th October.
120. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
121. **Serin:** Seen on several days, especially near Saucedilla.
122. **Citril Finch:** 18-20 seen on ascent of Pico de Villuercas on 30th October.
123. **Goldfinch:** Seen on several days
124. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
125. **Hawfinch:** One at Pago de San Clemente on 28th October and seen in flight in Monfragüe.
126. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Other wildlife

Mammals

Red Deer

Butterflies

Swallowtail

Red Admiral

Painted Lady

Cleopatra

Speckled Wood

Small White

Small Heath

Clouded Yellow

Small Copper

African Grass Blue

Lang's Short-tailed Blue

Dragonflies

Western Willow Emerald

Common Darter

Red-veined Darter

Violet Dropwing

Iberian Bluetail

Reptiles

Spanish Terrapin

Wall Lizard