

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo
REPORT ON AUTUMN HOLIDAY FOR TONY and ROB

9th November 2014: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

10th November 2014: Pico de Villuercas, Puerto Peña, Orellana, Vegas Altas.

11th November 2014: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, River Almonte, Talaván and plains north of Trujillo.

12th November 2014: Monfragüe National Park.

13th November 2014: Alcollarín Reservoir, Campo Lugar, Palazuelo, Sierra Brava Reservoir and Casas del Hito.

14th November 2014: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid.

Trip Report



Day 1: 9th November 2014

Tony and Rob arrived on schedule at 13.35 at Madrid airport and shortly after 14.00 we were heading out on the relatively quiet Sunday traffic on the Madrid ring-road

and then onto the motorway heading south-westwards into Extremadura. Crossing first of all the open plains of Castille La Mancha, **Red Kites** soon appeared and we saw several along the journey. However a special bonus was a great view of a **Black-winged Kite** just as we were pulling out of our refreshment stop. **White Storks** were seen about 100 kms out of Madrid, whilst just as we were entering Extremadura we saw the first **Common Cranes** of the trip, with a flock of about 70. It was late afternoon when we are arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, time for a little birding in the garden before evening set in, with **Azure-winged Magpies** seen.

Day 2: 10th November 2014

It was a beautiful clear and crisp start for the day, with some frost on the ground and not a breath of wind. We headed south and then east, to pass by the town of Guadalupe and then climb towards the Pico de Villuercas, the highest mountain (at 1600 metres) of the Villuercas range. We made our first stop in an area of mixed woodland (pines, Pyrenean oak and sweet chestnut) through which a small track ran. It was beside the track that we stopped and quite quickly got excellent views of a party of five **Citril Finches**, a real rarity for the area. After watching these attractive “mountain greenfinches” we continued our ascent to reach the summit of the Pico de Villuercas. Mercifully there was no wind, but even so the temperature was only just above freezing. The weather conditions through were ideal and we found **Black Redstart** and **Dunnock** on the rocky outcrops and scrub. Then a short rattling call was heard and an **Alpine Accentor** came into view, and we obtained very good views of it as it moved to an outcrop just in front of us.



Very satisfied with our visit to the mountains we repaired to a café for refreshments before heading south to the gorge of Puerto Peña. Here we had our picnic looking across to the magnificent rock face, whilst **Griffon Vultures** and **Crag Martins** shared the skies above. Parties of **Great Cormorants** were passing upstream to a reservoir. Then a **Bonelli's Eagle** glided into view and we enjoyed watching it circle above us. At one point it made a stoop and it seemed it was after the passing cormorants, as it regained height it then started a more purposeful flight and soon the reason became clear. Two cormorants were flying into range and the eagle made an attempt to take one, with a dramatic tussle in mid-flight. The cormorant got away and the eagle headed off. It was a tremendous thing to witness. Just before we left, we spotted a **Black Stork** wheeling in the sky besides a group of vultures: an excellent way to conclude our stop.

After lunch, the cloud started to appear and became thicker during the afternoon. We made a stop beside the Orellana Reservoir, but there was not much on the water, whilst the banks had a **Green Sandpiper**, some **Meadow Pipits** and rather distant **Common Waxbills**. More productive were the rice fields near the village of Vegas Altas. Almost all of the fields had been harvested and the stubble left over was proving attractive to groups of **Common Cranes** as well as smaller birds like **Bluethroat** and **Meadow Pipit**. We saw at two male **Hen Harriers** and several **Marsh Harriers** during the course of the afternoon, as well as groups of **Lapwings** and wintering **Skylarks**.

As we were leaving the area, drops of rains started to fall and this increased a bit on the journey back home. In the evening more steady rains started which then persisted for the night.

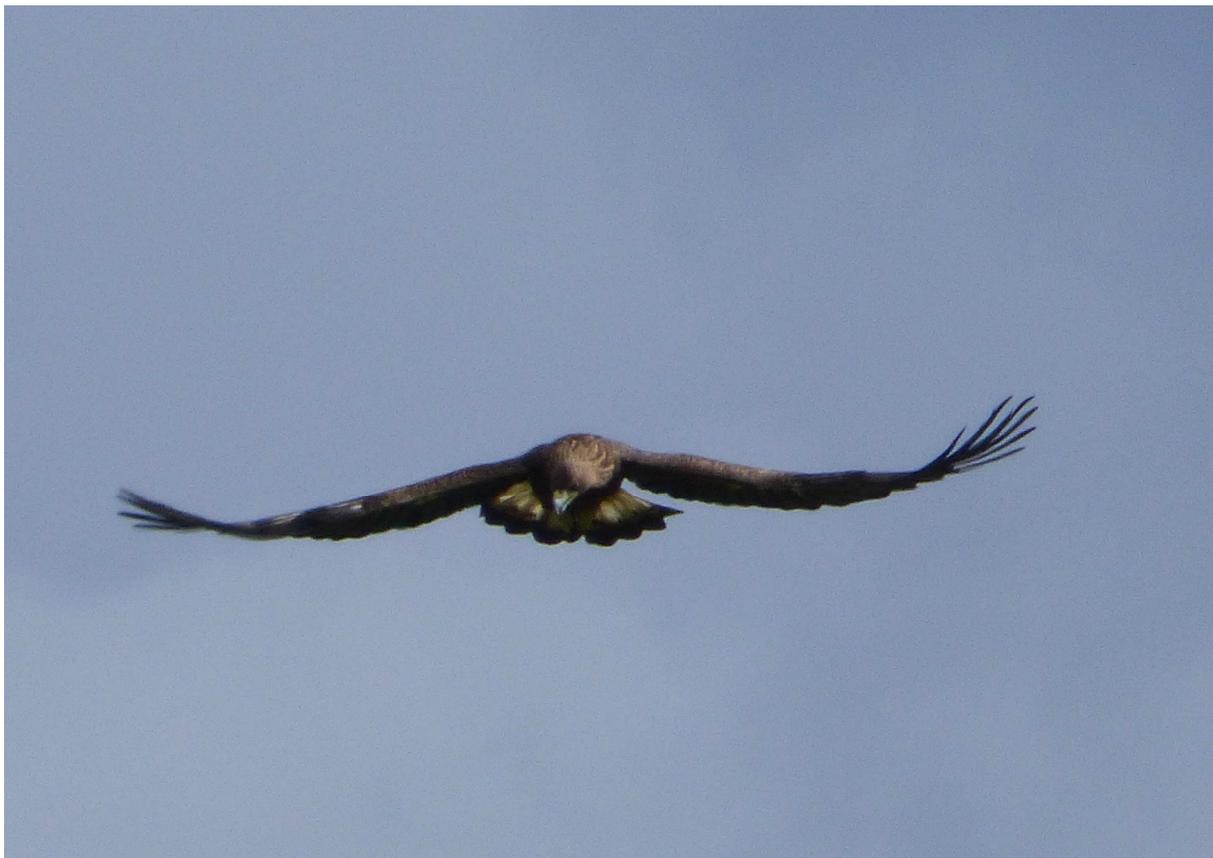
Day 3: 11th November 2014

There was heavy rain and high winds during the night and it did not look promising either as the day dawned. However, by about 09.30, the rain had moved on and the sky had brightened up considerably. Although there were some quite cloudy periods during the rest of the day, it stayed largely dry and we were able to enjoy birding all day long.

At our first stop on the plains west of Trujillo, we took the opportunity to study both **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**, whilst at the same time having great views of **Southern Grey Shrike**. Looking across a large open meadow, we found a party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** feeding. Despite being quite far away, the light was excellent and we were able to watch them as they foraged. Not far away we came across a group of **Great Bustards**, taking the advantage in the sunshine to preen and rearrange their rather bedraggled feathers. As we watched a group of about 25 **Little Bustard** flew in, joining a small group that were already in the field. Just a few minutes later a **Merlin** was seen dashing low across the field.

We dodged a shower by taking a coffee break and then crossed a further expansive plain before stopping at the River Almonte. Here we quickly obtained excellent views

of a pair of **Black Wheatear**, as well as a couple of **Black Redstarts** to boot. Pleased with the morning we then drove north to stop beside the Talaván reservoir for our picnic. We were just turning into the parking area when the large and distinctive shape of a **Golden Eagle** flew in front of us, chased by a mobbing **Marsh Harrier**. A second eagle followed. There followed a prolonged and rewarding observation of the pair of eagles as they flew and soared close by, sometimes dropping down to the ground, sometimes interacting with each other. It was a real treat. It was only when they disappeared from view that we could concentrate on completing the picnic.



After lunch we made a brief visit to an area of plains to the north, where there was a good selection of birds including six **Little Bustard**, some **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, **Golden Plover** and hordes of larks and pipits. But it was at our final stop where we encountered even more birds, including a flocks hundreds strong of **Calandra Lark** and a juvenile **Golden Eagle**. We also obtained good views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** on the ground as well as in flight, and a small group of **Stock Doves**.

Our return to base was marked by the spectacle of **Red Kites** gathering before going to roost, sometimes almost twenty birds present in the sky together.

Day 4: 12th November 2014

It appeared quite misty first thing, but the weather steadily improved during the day. There were good periods of sunshine late morning, albeit with a fresh wind, but by late afternoon the sky had cleared and the wind had dropped. A **Hawfinch** was seen well but briefly just in front of the house before we set off.

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 drove through the park, stopping to watch small groups of **Red Deer** as they fed on the hillsides. We made our first stop at the viewpoint at the Portilla del Tiétar. Here magnificent rock formations rose above the water and we could watch **vultures** at close quarters, including some stunning **Black Vultures**.

The target species here was the Spanish Imperial Eagle. We had a long wait, but more than amply rewarded with first of all a juvenile **Bonelli's Eagle** flying over, followed shortly later by a juvenile **Golden Eagle**, coming across in the opposite direction. A **Peregrine** and **Sparrowhawk** were also seen. Closer at hand we also got beautiful views of birds like **Black Redstart** and **Long-tailed Tit**. After no less than three and a half hours, by which time we had had our picnic lunch, we heard to the north a single barking call of the eagle and there soaring against a dark cloud was a fine adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. Despite the distance, the white leading edges to the wings were magnificently visible. We watched it as it drifted away. Martin headed off to collect the car and as he did so, saw the eagle returning. There followed a brilliant display of mobbing as the **Spanish Imperial Eagle** soared, pitched and dive-bombed **Griffon Vultures** and on one occasion a **Black Vulture** too. Talons were often locked between the individuals concerned. The recompense for our patience had been superb!

With the afternoon ahead we stopped in a patch of woodland, where we had glimpses of **Hawfinches**, before having a long stop at the iconic Peña Falcon viewpoint, now bathed in sunshine, where we watched hundreds of **Griffon Vultures** riding the thermals and up draughts. Nearby we made another stop to watch the vultures landing and squabbling amongst themselves at much closer quarters. **Crag Martins** were offering us good views, as well as a **Blue Rock Thrush**.



The sun was setting so we made it back to the Portilla del Téitar for the finale. As we got there **Griffon Vultures** were still arriving for roost and hidden from view, a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** barked. It was about 18.30, when the dusk had reached a point where the details on the cliff face were no longer visible, that we started to hear the sonorous hoots of an **Eagle Owl**. It called continually for about 15 minutes and at one point moved to the top of a dead tree where we could see its form, including the ear tufts, clearly. At 18.45 it disappeared to hunt and very satisfied with the achievements of the day we headed back to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

Day 5: 13th November 2014

It had rained during the night and for most of the day there was the threat of rain, with heavy overcast skies. Generally though it stayed dry and it was quite mild.

We headed south to visit first of all the new Alcollarin reservoir. Here there were parties of duck, mainly **Mallard** and **Shoveler**, some **Pintail**, as well as large numbers of **Little Grebe**, two **Black-necked Grebe** and many **Great Crested Grebe**. A fine selection of herons and egrets were also present, especially **Great White Egrets**. From Alcollarín we stopped for coffee, dodging a heavy rainstorm as we did so and then stopped to peer through the rain drops at a party of rather damp looking **Stone Curlew**. From there we descended to the irrigated farmlands dedicated mainly to rice production. The harvest was still underway (rather late this

year) and some of the fields had been ploughed after harvest. These muddy fields are normally attractive to waders, but with the heavy rains, many were too full of water. However we did find one which had a very smart flock of ten **Kentish Plover**, as well as **Dunlin**. **Common Cranes** were feeding in groups whilst **Spanish Sparrows** rose in unison from the fields, their flocks being hundreds strong. We stopped at a reed-filled ditch where we had excellent views of a group of **Red Avadavat**, including a male in full breeding plumage. **Common Waxbills** were also close by.

We returned to Casas Rural El Recuerdo for lunch in the garden, and then returned to check the Sierra Brava Reservoir, where many thousands of duck, mainly **Shoveler** but also a raft of **Wigeon** were present. We surveyed the rice areas to the south, watching male **Hen Harrier**, and so several **Marsh Harriers** quartering the area whilst flocks of **Common Cranes** started to form pre-roost gatherings. We concluded the visit by returning to the rice fields again near Madrigalejo. Here on ploughed fields, many **Black-headed Gulls** gathered, amongst them was also a first winter **Mediterranean Gull**, We made a final stop at the edge of the plains nearby where we watched a **Little Owl** peering at us from a pile of rocks. Soon after the clouds thickened and heavy rain started which continued through the night.

Day 6: 14th November 2014



The final morning in Extremadura dawned misty with some rain, but during the morning there were long periods of fine weather for our drive back to Madrid. We stopped for about an hour at the Arrocampo Reservoir, built to provide cooling water for the Almaráz nuclear power station. It was a very productive stop with several

sightings of **Purple Swamphen**, but also most pleasingly good views of at least two **Bluethroat**. There were numerous **Chiffchaffs** in the emergent vegetation. We had a good onward run to Madrid with a variety of birds of prey seen, including **Sparrowhawk**, **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, **Common Buzzard** and numerous **Red Kites**. We arrived, as planned just before 13.00 for check-in at the airport.

Annotated List of Species Seen

Birds

1. **Little Grebe**: Probably over a 100 present at Alcollarín on 13th November.
2. **Great Crested Grebe**: Present at Alcollarín on 13th November.
3. **Black-necked Grebe**: Two at Alcollarín on 13th November
4. **Great Cormorant**: Seen most days.
5. **Cattle Egret**: Seen most days.
6. **Little Egret**: Seen most days
7. **Great Egret**: Seen on the rice fields, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
8. **Grey Heron**: Seen every day.
9. **Black Stork**: One at Puerto Peña on 10th November.
10. **White Stork**: Seen almost daily, especially on rice fields.
11. **Egyptian Goose**: At least six at Alcollarín on 13th November.
12. **Wigeon**: At least twenty at Sierra Brava reservoir on 13th November.
13. **Gadwall**: Seen at Orellana reservoir and Alcollarín.
14. **Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín.
15. **Pintail**: Small parties seen at Alcollarín and at Arrocampo.
16. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
17. **Shoveler**: Seen at Talaván, Alcollarín, Sierra Brava and Arrocampo reservoirs.
18. **Tufted Duck**: Three at Arrocampo on 14th November.
19. **Black-winged Kite**: Two seen en route from Madrid on 9th November.
20. **Red Kite**: Seen daily.
21. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
22. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
23. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost daily.

24. **Hen Harrier:** Two males seen on 10th November, and single males on 11th and 13th.
25. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen at Monfragüe and on return to Madrid.
26. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost daily.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** A bird in Monfragüe on 12th November.
28. **Golden Eagle:** A pair at Talaván reservoir on 11th November and another seen later that day. One juvenile at Monfragüe on 12th.
29. **Bonelli's Eagle:** One at Puerto Peña on 10th November and a juvenile at Monfragüe on 12th.
30. **Common Kestrel:** Seen daily.
31. **Merlin:** Seen on three days on the plains.
32. **Peregrine Falcon:** One at Monfragüe on 12th November.
33. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on two days.
34. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
35. **Moorhen:** Seen at Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
36. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo on 14th November.
37. **Common Coot:** Present on all large water bodies.
38. **Common Crane:** Seen almost daily with hundreds present on rice fields.
39. **Little Bustard:** A total of about 35 seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 11th November.
40. **Great Bustard:** About 25 seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 11th November and five near Madrigalejo on 13th.
41. **Stone Curlew:** Roosting flock at Campo Lugar on 13th November.
42. **Kentish Plover:** About 10 seen near Palazuelo on 13th November.
43. **Golden Plover:** A couple of small parties of single figures seen on plains Santa Marta de Magasca on 11th November
44. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen daily and in good numbers on the plains and rice fields.
45. **Dunlin:** Single figures near Palazuelo on 13th November.
46. **Common Snipe:** Good numbers on the rice fields and also at Arrocampo.
47. **Greenshank:** About six seen near Palazuelo on 13th November and one at Alcollarín.
48. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen most days.

49. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Talaván on 11th November.
50. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen almost daily.
51. **Mediterranean Gull:** A first winter bird near Madrigalejo on 13th November.
52. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen almost daily.
53. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** A small party on edge of rice fields at Vegas Altas on 10th November and about six seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 11th November.
54. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** 30+ seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 11th November
55. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
56. **Stock Dove:** Four on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 11th November
57. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
58. **Collared Dove:** Seen almost daily.
59. **Eagle Owl:** One seen at Monfragüe on 12th November.
60. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains near Campo Lugar, also heard at Pago de San Clemente.
61. **Kingfisher:** Seen on several days.
62. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
63. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Recorded in Mongragüe, the Villuercas mountains and near Palazuelo.
64. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** One heard drumming at Puerto Peña.
65. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo and near Campo Lugar.
66. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
67. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
68. **Woodlark:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Monfragüe.
69. **Skylark:** Seen on several days.
70. **Crag Martin:** Seen daily.
71. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
72. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
73. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
74. **Wren:** Heard on a couple of days.
75. **Dunnock:** Seen on Villuercas Mountains on 10th November.

76. **Alpine Accentor**: One on Villuercas Mountains on 10th November.
77. **Robin**: Seen daily.
78. **Bluethroat**: Seen on rice fields on 10th November and at Arrocampo on 14th.
79. **Black Redstart**: Seen daily.
80. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
81. **Black Wheatear**: A pair at River Almonte on 11th November.
82. **Northern Wheatear**: One near Santa Marta de Magasca on 11th November.
83. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Monfragüe.
84. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
85. **Song Thrush**: Seen almost days.
86. **Redwing**: Seen or heard most days.
87. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains and at Alcollarín.
88. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
89. **Zitting Cisticola**. Seen on most days.
90. **Dartford Warbler**: Heard or seen on several days.
91. **Sardinian Warbler**: Heard and/or seen daily.
92. **Blackcap**: Seen daily.
93. **Chiffchaff**: Seen every day in good numbers.
94. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on two days.
95. **Crested Tit**: Recorded in Villuercas Mountains and Monfragüe.
96. **Blue Tit**: Seen on several days.
97. **Great Tit**: Seen almost daily.
98. **Bearded Tit**: Heard at Arrocampo on 14th November
99. **Nuthatch**: Recorded in Villuercas Mountains.
100. **Penduline Tit**: Heard at Arrocampo on 14th November
101. **Southern Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
102. **Jay**: Seen in Monfragüe, Villuercas Mountains, and on return to Madrid.
103. **Azure-winged Magpie**: Seen daily.
104. **Magpie**: Seen daily.

105. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
106. **Raven:** Seen almost every day.
107. **Common Starling:** Seen on plains.
108. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
109. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
110. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily, with vast flocks on rice fields.
111. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on both visits to the rice fields.
112. **Rock Sparrow:** Singles seen briefly on three days: near Santa Marta de Magasca, in Monfragüe and near Madrigalejo.
113. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields on 10th and 13th November.
114. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields on 10th and 13th November, and at Pago de San Clemente on 11th.
115. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
116. **Serin:** Seen on several days.
117. **Citril Finch:** At least five seen on ascent of Pico de Villuercas on 10th November.
118. **Greenfinch:** Seen at Arrocampo.
119. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
120. **Siskin:** Recorded in the Villuercas Mountains.
121. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
122. **Hawfinch:** One at Pago de San Clemente on 12th November and seen in flight in Monfragüe.
123. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Villuercas and at Monfragüe.
124. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

Mammals

Red Deer

Roe Deer