

## Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

### REPORT ON WINTER HOLIDAY FOR PAM

#### Itinerary (16<sup>th</sup> January – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015)

**16<sup>th</sup> January 2015:** Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo,

**17<sup>th</sup> January 2015:** Exploring the plains between Trujillo and Santa Marta de Magasca

**18<sup>th</sup> January 2015:** Free day

**19<sup>th</sup> January 2015:** Monfragüe National Park.

**20<sup>th</sup> January 2015:** Plains of Campo Lugar, Alcollarín Reservoir, Casas del Hito and Sierra Brava Reservoir

**21<sup>st</sup> January 2015:** Plains of Belén, Santa Marta de Magasca, River Almonte, Hinojal, Trujillo

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015:** Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, the Orellana Reservoir and Palazuelo

**23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015:** Arrocampo reservoir, Valdecañas and return to Madrid



#### Trip Report

##### **Day 1: 16<sup>th</sup> January 2015: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo**

Pam arrived on schedule at just before 20.00 and we set off for the drive from Madrid to Extremadura. Despite being a Friday evening, the traffic was light. We stopped for a meal after at about 21.00 and reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 23.40.

## Day 2: 17<sup>th</sup> January 2015: Plains and river valleys near Santa Marta de Magasca

Accompanied by Mark Cocker, we set off after breakfast. It was a bright, crisp and frosty morning. We drove north, enjoying a magnificent view of Trujillo in morning sunshine and then headed west on the old road to Cáceres. We took the turn to Santa Marta de Magasca, passing through a belt of *dehesa* before reaching the edge of open country. Here we stopped and started the birding for the day. An **Iberian Grey Shrike** sat atop a bush, giving its squeaky song, whilst **Crested** and **Thekla Larks** foraged nearby. Parties of **Azure-winged Magpies** moved through the edge of the woodland. We heard a **Corn Bunting** singing. We paused on an area of high ground, where **Calandra Larks** chased each other across a wide field and we also got views of them on the ground. But most memorable was a party of about 50 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, feeding in beautiful sunshine.

We stopped at the top of a wide dirt track and walk slowly along it. **Chiffchaffs**, delighted us with their busy foraging, behaving rather like Dunnocks on the ground as they flicked their wings. We found a distant group of **Little Bustard** and saw more **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** (probably the same group as before) feeding at closer range and obtained a few sightings of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** in flight overhead. A group of three **Great Bustard** were seen flying distantly and a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** also gave a brief view, flying low and distantly across the fields.

We stopped for coffee in the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, and then surveyed the beautiful Tamuja river afterwards, watching **Red Kites** gliding over the ridge tops, before then stopping beside the River Magasca for our picnic. The sunshine was deliciously warm in this sheltered spot. Several **Griffon Vultures**, **Black Vultures**, **Red Kites** and **Ravens** were in the sky together downstream from us. An adult **Golden Eagle** appeared and then a few minutes later a sub-adult bird was also seen soaring in the warming air currents.

The wind picked up a bit after lunch and we returned to the plains and made a walk along a drovers trail. Flocks of **Skylarks**, **Linnets** and **Goldfinches** abounded, as well as groups of **Calandra Lark**, **Skylarks** and **Thekla Larks**. On the road back to Trujillo we stopped to admire an old water mill fed by an aqueduct. We made a short detour on the plain of Belén where we found a party of **Great Bustards** as well as a distant **Little Owl**. In Trujillo, we made a final stop at the old (19<sup>th</sup> century) *lavandero* or communal laundry, on the way to which we paused to enjoy the sight of **Chiffchaffs** fluttering over the surface of a small pool, feeding on midges from the water surface.

## Day 3: 19<sup>th</sup> January 2015: Monfragüe National Park

It was bright and sunny as we set off, although with a keen wind. We travelled northwards, dropping from the granite batholith of Trujillo to the vast expanse of undulating *dehesa* landscape, broken only by the deep River Almonte valley. We saw a group of **Red Deer** in a belt of woodland en route. We stopped first of

all at the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. As we arrived a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was in sight, but soon had drifted off. The scene was one of great beauty and periodically a **Griffon Vulture** would drift overhead to land on the cliff face, where others were perched, some taking the opportunity to warm their wings in the sunshine. Up the Tiétar valley the backdrop was of the snow-clad Gredos Mountains.



Often there was the cacophony of noise when a pair mated. A **Kingfisher** appeared perched on the trees opposite beside the water, whilst at close quarters there was a **Black Redstart** and a **Firecrest**. Hidden from view on the wooded slope on the other side of the river an **Eagle Owl** was calling.

Then an **Otter** appeared in the river below us. We watched enthralled as it fished and then moved upstream. It reappeared and we saw it fishing as well as spending some time on the bank opposite.

It had been a wonderful morning and reluctantly we drew ourselves away. Just as we did so the pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** reappeared and we watched a wonderful display of sky-dancing as well as one bird taking a piece of nest material to the nest site. Then it was time to warm ourselves up in front of the log fire in at the nearby bar and enjoy a hot coffee.



We then retracted our steps through the park, this time taking in the scenery. We had lunch beside the river, watching **Azure-winged Magpies** coming to visit the picnic area. We then stopped opposite the vast cliff of Peña Falcon, where we could admire the comings and goings of large numbers of **Griffon Vultures**, but the wind was very strong by then, so we found a more sheltered spot in the lee of the castle cliff. Here we enjoyed the final sunshine of the afternoon watching the **Griffon Vultures** arriving at nest sites, as well as a pair of **Red-billed Choughs** and **Ravens**, performing somersaults in the sky.

**Day 4: 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015:** Plains of Campo Lugar, Alcollarín Reservoir, Casas del Hito and Sierra Brava Reservoir

It was a cold and overcast day which started dry, but then deteriorated with rain and sleet, although there as little wind. We started at the plains near Campo Lugar, stopping first to watch a **Little Owl** atop a pile of stones, whilst in the opposite direction there were a party of ten **Great Bustard**, affording us excellent views. The plains were full of small birds: **Meadow Pipits, White Wagtails, Calandra Larks, Golden Plover** and **Lapwing**. **Common Starlings** were the most numerous bird though, with several large flocks numbering several hundreds feeding on pasture. We visited two small ponds, where there were about 80 **White Storks** feeding nearby, with small numbers of duck, mainly **Mallard** and **Teal**. Close to village of Campo Lugar we found a group of **Stone Curlews**, huddled against the worsening weather, but providing us with good views nevertheless.

After coffee we proceeded to the newly constructed Alcollarín Reservoir. There were bouts of rain and the cloud was very low, so visibility was not great. However, we were able to take in the huge number of waterfowl, including **Great Crested** and **Black-necked Grebes, Wigeon, Shoveler, Teal, Gadwall, Mallard, Tufted Duck** and **Pochard**. We found an obliging **Great White Egret**



feeding in a small pond and we spent a long period watching and photographing this elegant bird.



Nearby at our lunch spot, we watched **Kingfishers**, **Spoonbills** and other **Great White** and **Little Egrets**, as well as numerous **Chiffchaffs** feeding from the water's edge.

We crossed the plains again, this time with mist closing in and then drove beside some of the rice fields where **Common Crane** and **Greylag Geese** were feeding. We ended the afternoon taking in the spectacle of thousands of duck, almost all of them **Shoveler** on the great Sierra Brava reservoir,

#### **Day 5: 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015: Plains of Belén, Santa Marta de Magasca, River Almonte, Hinojal, Trujillo**

The sky had cleared overnight and we woke to a very heavy frost. It was a beautiful morning and we paused to watch **Common Cranes** feeding on a frosty field beneath the holm oak trees. Then we set out over the Belén Plains where we found a party of about ten **Great Bustard**, as well as sightings of **Griffon Vulture** and large flocks of **Calandra Lark**, **Skylark** and **Corn Bunting**. We moved onto the area near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, where we watched a party of nearly 25 **Great Bustard** in flight and then settling nearby to give us excellent views. By now the wind was picking up and cloud was moving in from the west. We stopped for lunch at the River Almonte, trying to find some shelter from the keen wind. It was a very productive stop with good views of a pair of **Black Wheatear**, as well as **Rock Bunting** and **Thekla Lark**.

From there we checked another area of plains near Hinojal, but the conditions were becoming quite difficult, although we did find a party of 11 **Tufted Duck** on a small pool. So we elected to return to Trujillo to watch the midge-feeding **Chiffchaffs** and attempt some photography on their foraging. We enjoyed the spectacle, with the **Chiffchaffs** being joined at times by **White** and **Grey Wagtails**.

**Day 6: 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015:** Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, the Orellana Reservoir and Palazuelo

It was a fine and sunny morning, slightly milder than previous days, and during the day there were periods of a fresh breeze, but generally a very pleasant day weather-wise.

We spent the whole day in the rice-growing areas to the south of Zorita, apart from a short detour for a lunch spot. During the morning we followed a grid work of tracks, obtaining views of thousands of **Common Crane** as well as a several **Great Bustard**. The flocks of small birds, especially **Spanish Sparrows**, were an attraction to harriers and we had good views of both **Marsh** and **Hen Harriers** in this area. After coffee, we visited a similar area, at the Crane information area of Moheda Alta. **Cranes** were scattered through the area and on a small pool, there were **Common Coot**, **Cormorant** and duck such as **Shoveler**. Following a visit to the Information Centre, we then drove to the banks of the Orellana Reservoir for lunch. This was a very productive and attractive area, with many **Crag Martins**, along with a **House Martin** and **Swallow**, feeding close to the bank, a variety of duck resting in the bay (**Shoveler**, **Gadwall**, **Mallard**, **Tufted Duck** and **Pochard**) whilst we found amongst the **Black-headed Gulls**, a fine first-winter **Little Gull** feeding daintily over the water surface.



Returning to the rice fields we spent the afternoon near the town of Palazuelo, where we found parties of waders such as **Black-winged Stilt**, **Dunlin**, **Little Stint**, **Ringed Plover** and **Little Ringed Plover**. Everywhere there were **Lapwing** and **Snipe**. Along the ditches there were parties of sparrows, including **Tree Sparrows** and we also enjoyed a fine view of a **Kingfisher**.

We ended the day again south of Madrigalejo where we took in the double spectacle of thousands upon thousands of **Common Cranes** at roost and the arrival of perhaps more than a hundred **Marsh Harriers**, as well as about five male **Hen Harrier** at their roost in an adjacent field (where there were also murmurations of thousands of **Spanish Sparrows**). The evening sky provided a vivid backdrop to this wonderful sight.

**Day 7: 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015:** Arrocampo reservoir, Valdecañas and return to Madrid

It was a beautiful clear, calm and sunny morning as we left Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 09.30. We arrived at the Arrocampo reservoir under perfect conditions. The reservoir provides cooling water for the Almaráz nuclear power station and has a fairly constant water level. There is a good fringing vegetation of reed mace, rushes and some reeds.



We stopped in one area and enjoyed over an hour with excellent views of two male **Bluethroats**, sometimes in a territorial dispute, as well as **Purple Swamphen**, and **Marsh Harrier**, whilst **Water Rail** and **Cetti's Warblers** called from the vegetation in front of us. At a next stop, we found a wonderful male **Little Bittern**.





**Chiffchaffs** as always foraged in the reeds. After coffee, we drove through an area of pasture with scattered trees, where flocks of **Common Starlings** were feeding. **Red Kites** circled and at one point we watched vultures descend onto a carcass. We watched the interactions on the ground between the **Griffon Vultures**, with **Black Vultures** rather haughtily watching on. **Ravens** and **magpies**, in numbers around the scene were dwarfed.

We then headed further west to a small dam surrounded by *dehesa*. This is Charca Salado and it was one of the most beautiful spots of the whole week. The water was still and reflected the green of the *dehesa* woodland, whilst in the background stood the impressive Gredos Mountains, with a respectable covering of snow, resplendent against the cloudless sky. On the placid water there were various duck including **Gadwall**, **Wigeon**, **Mallard** and **Teal**, as well as **Little Grebe** and a **Black-necked Grebe**. Dozens of **White Wagtails** gracefully were catching flies from the surface of the water, acrobatically manoeuvring over the middle of the water. We found a picnic spot affording a good view across this picturesque place.

We called into the information centre at Saucedilla and then headed back onto the motorway and drove onto the village of El Gordo where we stopped looking across a part of the Valdecañas reservoir. There was a good selection of waterfowl, including **Pochard**, **Pintail**, **Gadwall** and **Greylag Geese**, as well as large numbers of **Common Coot**. By now it was time to proceed with the journey, and we clocked the final sightings of birds like **White Stork** and **Red Kite**. We reached the airport at 17.30 with ample time for the check-in.

### **Annotated List of Birds Seen**

For a week which combined birdwatching with photography, we recorded a very satisfactory total of 115 species.



1. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir and at Charca Salado.
2. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Sierra Brava, Alcollarín, Arrocampo and Valdecañas reservoirs.
3. **Black-necked Grebe:** At least four seen at Alcollarín on 20<sup>th</sup> January and one at Charca Salado on 23<sup>rd</sup> January.
4. **Great Cormorant:** Seen every day.
5. **Little Bittern:** A male seen well and another heard at Arrocampo on 23<sup>rd</sup> January.
6. **Cattle Egret:** Seen most days, including large numbers following the plough in the rice fields.
7. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
8. **Great Egret:** Seen most days.
9. **Grey Heron:** Seen most day.
10. **White Stork:** Seen every day, including flocks of birds probably on migration.
11. **Spoonbill:** Three at Alcollarín on 20<sup>th</sup> January.
12. **Grey Lag Goose:** Hundreds present on the rice fields near Madrigalejo on 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> January and also present at Valdecañas reservoir on 23<sup>rd</sup>.
13. **Egyptian Goose:** Pairs at Alcollarín.
14. **Wigeon:** Seen at Alcollarín and Charca Salada.
15. **Gadwall:** Seen at Sierra Brava, Alcollarín, Moheda Alta, Charca Salado and Valdecañas.
16. **Teal:** Seen on most water bodies.
17. **Pintail:** Seen at Valdecañas.
18. **Mallard:** Seen almost every day.
19. **Shoveler:** Seen on most days and thousands at Sierra Brava.
20. **Pochard:** Seen at Alcollarín, Moheda Alta and Valdecañas reservoirs.

21. **Tufted Duck:** Seen at Alcollarín, near Hinojal (11 on 21<sup>st</sup>), Moheda Alta and Charca Salado.
22. **Red Kite:** Seen every day with large numbers, especially on plains near Trujillo.
23. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
24. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
25. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on several days, especially on rice fields (with treble figures at roost near Madrigalejo on 22<sup>nd</sup> January) and at Arrocampo.
26. **Hen Harrier:** A male seen on 20<sup>th</sup> January and several, including five males coming to the roost on 22<sup>nd</sup>.
27. **Sparrowhawk:** One seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 17<sup>th</sup> January.
28. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost every day.
29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** One seen briefly on 17<sup>th</sup> near Santa Marta de Magasca, and a pair watched at Monfragüe National Park on 19<sup>th</sup> January.
30. **Golden Eagle:** A total of four seen on 17<sup>th</sup> January near Santa Marta de Magasca and Trujillo.
31. **Common Kestrel:** Seen every day.
32. **Common Pheasant:** A female at Pago de San Clemente on 17<sup>th</sup> January.
33. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
34. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo.
35. **Moorhen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
36. **Purple Swamphen:** Two at Arrocampo on 23<sup>rd</sup> January.
37. **Common Coot:** Seen on most water bodies, in large numbers.
38. **Common Crane:** Seen almost daily, with many thousands on rice and maize fields near Madrigalejo.
39. **Little Bustard:** Six seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 17<sup>th</sup> January.

40. **Great Bustard:** Four seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and about 30 on Belén Plains on 17<sup>th</sup> January, about ten near Campo Lugar on 20<sup>th</sup>, about 35 seen south of Madrigalejo on 21<sup>st</sup> and about 10 on Belén Plains and 25 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 22<sup>nd</sup>.
41. **Stone Curlew:** About 15 near Campo Lugar on 20<sup>th</sup>.
42. **Little Ringed Plover:** About ten seen near Palazuelo on 20<sup>th</sup> January.
43. **Ringed Plover:** About 15 near Palazuelo on 20<sup>th</sup> January.
44. **Golden Plover:** Seen on rice fields, as well as plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Campo Lugar and Belén.
45. **Lapwing:** Seen every day.
46. **Dunlin:** About 40 near Palazuelo on 20<sup>th</sup> January.
47. **Little Stint:** About 20 near Palazuelo on 20<sup>th</sup> January.
48. **Common Snipe:** Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
49. **Greenshank:** One near Palazuelo and one at Arrocampo.
50. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
51. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Orellana reservoir and Charca Salado
52. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on several days, especially on the rice fields.
53. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on several days.
54. **Little Gull:** One first-winter bird at Orellana Reservoir on 22<sup>nd</sup> January.
55. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
56. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** About 50 near Santa Marta de Magasca.
57. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
58. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen on several days.
59. **Collared Dove:** Seen almost daily.
60. **Eagle Owl:** A bird calling at Monfragüe on 19<sup>th</sup> January.
61. **Little Owl:** Seen and/or heard on most days, including Santa Marta de Magasca, Belén Plains and Campo Lugar.
62. **Kingfisher:** Seen almost daily.



63. **Hoopoe**: Seen almost daily.
64. **Green Woodpecker**: Seen at Valdecañas on 23<sup>rd</sup> January.
65. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on open plains and on rice fields.
66. **Crested Lark**: Seen almost daily.
67. **Thekla Lark**: Seen almost daily.
68. **Skylark**: Seen on plains and rice fields.
69. **Crag Martin**: Seen almost daily.
70. **Barn Swallow**: One at Orellana on 22<sup>nd</sup> January.
71. **House Martin**: Two at Orellana Reservoir on 22<sup>nd</sup> January.
72. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen daily.
73. **Water Pipit**: One seen on rice fields and one at Arrocampo.
74. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen almost daily.
75. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily in large numbers.
76. **Robin**: Seen almost daily.
77. **Bluethroat**: Two males at Arrocampo on 23<sup>rd</sup>
78. **Black Redstart**: Seen daily.
79. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily.
80. **Black Wheatear**: A pair beside River Almonte on 21<sup>st</sup> January.
81. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
82. **Song Thrush**: Seen almost daily
83. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen at Monfragüe.
84. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded on several days.
85. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on rice fields.
86. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen near Arrocampo on 23<sup>rd</sup> January.
87. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen at Monfragüe.

88. **Blackcap**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
89. **Common Chiffchaff**: Seen daily in large numbers and in every habitat.
90. **Firecrest**: Seen at Monfragüe.
91. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on several days.
92. **Blue Tit**: Seen daily.
93. **Great Tit**: Seen daily.
94. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen almost daily.
95. **Jay**: Recorded on several days.
96. **Azure-winged Magpie**: Seen daily.
97. **Magpie**: Seen daily.
98. **Red-billed Chough**: A pair at Monfragüe.
99. **Jackdaw**: Seen on several days.
100. **Raven**: Seen almost daily.
101. **Common Starling**: Seen near Campo Lugar and Arrocampo.
102. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
103. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
104. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen almost daily.
105. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields on 22<sup>nd</sup> January.
106. **Rock Sparrow**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and Belén.
107. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on the rice fields
108. **Chaffinch**: Seen daily.
109. **Serin**: Seen almost daily.
110. **Greenfinch**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
111. **Goldfinch**: Seen almost daily.
112. **Linnet**: Seen on several days.

- 113. **Hawfinch:** Seen briefly on two days.
- 114. **Rock Bunting:** Recorded beside River Almonte.
- 115. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

### **Mammals seen**

Red Deer  
Otter  
Fox  
Rabbit  
Iberian Hare