

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

REPORT ON WINTER HOLIDAY FOR JOHN AND PENNY

Itinerary (8th February – 12th February 2015)

6th February 2015: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Arrocampo.

7th February 2015: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, the Orellana Reservoir and Sierra Brava

8th February 2015: Plains of Campo Lugar, Alcollarín Reservoir, Santa Amalia

9th February 2015: Santa Marta de Magasaca, Monfragüe National Park.

10th February 2015: Alange, Mérida, Montánchez and Trujillo

11th February 2015: Plains near Cáceres, Almonte River, Talaván, and return on Monroy road, Belen Plains

12th February 2015: Arrocampo reservoir, Valdecañas and return to Madrid

Trip Report

Day 1: Transfer from Madrid Airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

John and Penny arrived just ahead of schedule at 10.15 and before 11.00 we were heading from the airport in Madrid, to take the motorway for Extremadura. It was a cold, but sunny day and we stopped for coffee at about half way where a **Crested Lark** was seen in the car park and a **Black-winged Kite** beside the slip-road. To the north throughout the journey we could see the snowy peaks of the Gredos Mountains. We stopped for a picnic lunch at the beside the beautiful lake of Charco Salado, where **Barn Swallows** hawked over the still water and there were **Little** and **Great Crested Grebes**, as well as several duck species present. We then spent a spell at the Arrocampo Reservoir, enjoying wonderful views of **Bluethroat**, as well as numerous wintering **Chiffchaff**, some **Marsh Harrier** and **Purple Swamphen**.



Day 2: 7th February 2015: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, the Orellana Reservoir and Sierra Brava

It was a cold and frosty morning. From their bedroom window, John and Penny obtained a glimpse of a **Hawfinch** passing through the trees. The morning was focused on watching and photographing **Common Cranes**, present in huge numbers, mainly on the rice and maize stubble fields near Madrigalejo. Also seen were vast flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** and good numbers of **Marsh Harriers**. At the Orellana Reservoir, we refound a drake **Lesser Scaup** that had been seen there a few days earlier – a first record for Extremadura.



There was also an adult and a juvenile **Little Gull** as well as large numbers of **hirundines**. We stopped for lunch at a picnic area in open *dehesa* parkland at Moheda Alta, enjoying the presence of species like **Firecrest**, **Dartford Warbler**, **Common Chiffchaff** and **Long-tailed Tits**, with the calls of cranes everywhere. We then visited another section of the Orellana Reservoir, where there were excellent views of parties of small finches, such as **Linnet** and **Goldfinch**, as well as **Rock Bunting**. Returning through rice fields, we enjoyed watching hundreds more **Common Cranes**, as well as a **Water Pipit**, before making a final stop overlooking the Sierra Brava Reservoir to witness thousands of **Shoveler** and **Pintail**, as well as a party of 12 **Common Shelduck**.

Day 3: 8th February 2015: Plains of Campo Lugar, Alcollarín Reservoir, Santa Amalia

It was another fine but cold day. We started the day on the plains near the village of Campo Lugar, seeing **Great Bustards** and a small group of **Little Bustard**. There were large numbers of wintering **Golden Plover**, **Lapwing** and **Common Starling** which kept us entertained until we found another group of ten **Little Bustard**. On a pair of pools there were plentiful **Common Teal**, hawking **Barn Swallows** and a group of Spoonbill. Beside the village we watched a winter roost of **Stone Curlew**. We then spent the middle part of the day at the newly-created Alcollarín Reservoir. There were large numbers of duck, which at a small weir we found a **Squacco Heron**, **Great White Egret** and watched **Kingfishers** fighting. We completed the afternoon on the rice fields near Santa Amalia, where as well as large numbers of **Common Crane**,

there were a selection of waders present including several hundred **Black-tailed Godwit**.

Day 4: 9th February 2015: Santa Marta de Magasca and Monfragüe National Park.

We started the day on the plains west of Trujillo, where we found both species of **sandgrouse** on a stony field. Moving west of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we located about 40 **Great Bustard** in total in three groups. We then headed to the Monfragüe National Park where we concentrated our efforts at the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint, staying there until 16.00. We were treated almost the whole time to a breath-taking display from the pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, as they in turn mobbed and harried their **Griffon Vulture** neighbours: the female in particular appearing the most aggressive. On one occasion a **Black Vulture** was mobbed too. We also saw a **Black Stork** drifting past. We stopped briefly at the Peña Falcón viewpoint at the end of the afternoon, but it was very windy. Hundreds of **Griffon Vultures** were in the air and we also saw a **Blue Rock Thrush**.

Day 5: 10th February 2015: Alange, Mérida, Montánchez and Trujillo

John and Penny had a superb view of a Hawfinch from their bedroom window after breakfast. We enjoyed another fine day and headed south of Mérida, stopping to photograph a colony of flowering **Giant Orchids**, the earliest orchid in bloom in Extremadura.



Nearby we enjoyed a pleasant walk beside the Alange reservoir, seeing lots of small birds, especially **Thekla Lark** and finches. After coffee in Alange we then walked on the Roman Bridge in Mérida seeing a **Little Bittern**. Then we visited Montánchez Castle, where as well as superb views over central Extremadura, we found three **Alpine Accentors**, offering excellent views. We finished the day with a stop at the San Lazaro park in Trujillo where dozens of **Common Chiffchaffs** and **White Wagtails** were hunting midges at the water's edge.

Day 6: 11th February 2015: Plains near Cáceres, Almonte River, Talaván, and return on Monroy road, Belen Plains

The day was rather overcast at the beginning but improved quite quickly. We visited first thing the plains to the west of Santa Marta de Magasca, where we saw several groups of **Great Bustard**, including a party not far from the road which included two males initiating some display behaviour. We took a minor road westwards, stopping to watch a **Black Vulture** standing on the ground, beside which for some time there was a **Red Kite**, wholly dwarfed by the former. A ring-tail **Hen Harrier** was seen a few minutes later. At the River Almonte we stopped and obtained excellent view of a female **Black Wheatear** and two **Black Storks** were also watched gliding overhead.



We had lunch beside the Talaván reservoir. The water level was very high, but our attention was almost wholly focused on an awesome interaction between three **Golden Eagles**. Following coffee at Monroy we returned to Trujillo with a stop on the Belén Plains to see two **Little Owl**.

12th February 2015: Arrocampo reservoir, Valdecañas and return to Madrid

Leaving Casa Rural El Recuerdo after breakfast, we headed straight to the Arrocampo Reservoir where we settled in one of the hides for a couple of hours. During the stay we had superb views of two male **Bluethroats**, as well as **Spoonbill**, **Great White Egret** and **Reed Bunting**. Close to the hide we also saw two **Penduline Tit** and a **Jack Snipe**. We checked the agricultural land in the vicinity but failed to find Black-winged Kite, but were rewarded by several **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** on the ground.



We had lunch on a quiet valley near the Valdecañas dam, with rocky outcrops above us supporting a colony of **Griffon Vulture**. A **Sparrowhawk** was seen at that spot.

Then we started our return to Madrid, reaching the airport, as planned, at about 16.30.

Annotated List of Birds Seen

For a week which focused on bird photography, we recorded a very satisfactory total of 126 species.

1. **Little Grebe:** Seen on several days.

2. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Sierra Brava, Alcollarín and Alange reservoirs.
3. **Black-necked Grebe:** 36 at Orellana Reservoir on 7th February and several at Alcollarín on 8th.
4. **Great Cormorant:** Seen every day.
5. **Little Bittern:** A female seen from the Roman Bridge Mérida.
6. **Squacco Heron:** One at Alcollarín on 8th February.
7. **Cattle Egret:** Seen most days, including large numbers following the plough in the rice fields.
8. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
9. **Great Egret:** Seen most days.
10. **Grey Heron:** Seen most day.
11. **Black Stork:** One at Monfragüe on 9th February and two over River Almonte on 11th.
12. **White Stork:** Seen every day, including flocks of birds probably on migration.
13. **Spoonbill:** Six at Campo Lugar and one at Alcollarín on 8th February and one at Arrocampo on 12th.
14. **Grey Lag Goose:** Seen on rice fields and on Sierra Brava and Alcollarín Reservoirs on 7th and 8th February.
15. **Egyptian Goose:** Pairs at Alcollarín.
16. **Common Shelduck:** 12 at Sierra Brava on 7th February and 10 at Alcollarín on 8th.
17. **Wigeon:** Seen at Alcollarín.
18. **Gadwall:** Seen on most water bodies.
19. **Teal:** Seen on most water bodies.
20. **Pintail:** Several thousand at Sierra Brava on 7th February, also seen at Alcollarín.
21. **Mallard:** Seen every day.
22. **Shoveler:** Seen on most days and thousands at Sierra Brava.

23. **Pochard:** Seen at Orellana and Alcollarín reservoirs.
24. **Tufted Duck:** Seen at Orellana and Alcollarín reservoirs.
25. **Lesser Scaup:** One male at Orellana Reservoir on 7th February.
26. **Black-winged Kite:** A total of three seen on journey from Madrid on 6th February.
27. **Red Kite:** Seen every day with large numbers, especially on plains near Trujillo.
28. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen on several days.
29. **Black Vulture:** Seen on several days.
30. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on almost every day.
31. **Hen Harrier:** A female near Santa Marta de Magasca on 11th February.
32. **Sparrowhawk:** One near Valdecañas on 12th February.
33. **Common Buzzard:** Seen every day.
34. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** A pair watched at Monfragüe National Park on 9th February.
35. **Golden Eagle:** A total of three seen on 11th February at Talaván.
36. **Common Kestrel:** Seen every day.
37. **Merlin:** One seen on 9th February.
38. **Peregrine Falcon:** One mobbing a Spanish Imperial Eagle on 9th February.
39. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on several days.
40. **Water Rail:** Heard and seen at Arrocampo.
41. **Moorhen:** Seen at Arrocampo and at Mérida.
42. **Purple Swamphen:** Heard and seen at Arrocampo.
43. **Common Coot:** Seen on most water bodies, in large numbers.
44. **Common Crane:** Seen almost daily, with many thousands on rice and maize fields near Madrigalejo.

45. **Little Bustard:** A party of between 6-8 and another of 10 seen near Campo Lugar on 8th February.
46. **Great Bustard:** 15 birds seen near Campo Lugar on 8th February, over 40 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 6th and over 80 on 11th.
47. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th and at Arrocampo.
48. **Stone Curlew:** About 15 near Campo Lugar on 8th February.
49. **Little Ringed Plover:** One near Arrocampo on 12th.
50. **Kentish Plover:** Seen near Santa Amalia on 8th February.
51. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields on 7th and 8th February.
52. **Golden Plover:** Seen on rice fields, as well as plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Campo Lugar and Belén.
53. **Lapwing:** Seen every day.
54. **Dunlin:** Seen near Santa Amalia on 8th February.
55. **Common Snipe:** Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
56. **Jack Snipe:** Three at Arrocampo on 12th February.
57. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Several hundred near Santa Amalia on 8th February.
58. **Greenshank:** Seen near Santa Amalia on 8th February.
59. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on most days.
60. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Orellana reservoir.
61. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on several days, especially on the rice fields.
62. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on several days.
63. **Little Gull:** One first-winter bird and at adult at Orellana Reservoir on 7th February.
64. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
65. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
66. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.

67. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen on several days.
68. **Collared Dove:** Seen almost daily.
69. **Little Owl:** Seen on Belén Plains on 11th February.
70. **Kingfisher:** Seen on several days.
71. **Hoopoe:** Seen on several days.
72. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on open plains and on rice fields.
73. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
74. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
75. **Skylark:** Seen on plains and rice fields.
76. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Orellana Reservoir on 7th February.
77. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
78. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
79. **House Martin:** Seen almost daily.
80. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
81. **Water Pipit:** One seen on rice fields on 7th February.
82. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily in large numbers.
83. **Alpine Accentor:** Three at Montánchez castle on 10th February.
84. **Robin:** Seen daily.
85. **Bluethroat:** Seen at Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
86. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
87. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
88. **Black Wheatear:** A female beside River Almonte on 11th February.
89. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
90. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
91. **Song Thrush:** Seen daily

92. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on 8th February.
93. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded on several days.
94. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on rice fields.
95. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen on 7th February.
96. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen or heard on several days.
97. **Blackcap**: Seen daily.
98. **Common Chiffchaff**: Seen daily in large numbers and in every habitat.
99. **Firecrest**: Seen or heard on several days.
100. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on several days.
101. **Blue Tit**: Seen daily.
102. **Great Tit**: Seen daily.
103. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Heard near Valdecañas.
104. **Penduline Tit**: Two at Arrocampo on 12th February.
105. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
106. **Jay**: Seen near Valdecañas.
107. **Azure-winged Magpie**: Seen daily.
108. **Magpie**: Seen daily.
109. **Jackdaw**: Seen on several days.
110. **Raven**: Seen almost daily.
111. **Common Starling**: Seen near Campo Lugar and Santa Marta de Magasca.
112. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
113. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
114. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen daily.
115. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields.

- 116. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields
- 117. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
- 118. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
- 119. **Greenfinch:** Seen almost daily.
- 120. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
- 121. **Siskin:** Calling at Valdecañas.
- 122. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
- 123. **Hawfinch:** Seen on two days.
- 124. **Rock Bunting:** Recorded beside River Almonte and Orellana Reservoir.
- 125. **Reed Bunting:** One at Arrocampo on 12th February.
- 126. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.