

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo
REPORT ON AUTUMN HOLIDAY FOR DAVID AND NANCY MASSIE



Itinerary (9th December 2015 – 16th December 2015)

9th December 2015: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

10th December 2015: Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas, Orellana Reservoir, Moheda Alta, Orellana and Cubilar Reservoirs

11th December 2015: Lacañada Hide at Torrejón El Rubio and Aldea del Obispo.

12th December 2015: Plains of Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir

13th December 2015: Plains west of Trujillo, Almonte River, Talaván, Hinojal and Monroy Road.

14th December 2015: Rice fields of Palazuelo and Santa Amalia, Montánchez castle.

15th December 2015: Plains west of Trujillo and Monfragüe National Park

16th December 2015: Arrocampo, Valdecañas and return to Madrid

Trip Report

9th December 2015: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

David and Nancy arrived a few minutes ahead of schedule just before 2pm and quickly had passed through the airport to be met by Martin at the arrivals gate. We set off straightaway around the Madrid ring-road to take the motorway to Extremadura. It was a fine afternoon and we made a stop halfway for a bite to eat, then reaching Casa Rural El Recuerdo shortly after 6pm.

10th December 2015: Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas, Orellana Reservoir, Moheda Alta, Orellana and Cubilar Reservoirs

It was a bit overcast for the morning, but the sun easily broke through the cloud, ensuring a sunny afternoon and just a light wind.

We stopped first of all at the old railway station at Madrigalejo where we saw 25 **Stone Curlew**, mostly in flight but several excellently on the ground. Then south of Madrigalejo we ventured onto an area of rice and maize stubble fields to watch flocks of hundreds of **Common Cranes**. Good numbers of **Lapwing** and **Black-headed Gull** were also present, as well as large flocks of **Spanish Sparrow**.

We had several sightings of **Black-winged Kite** and at one moment a **Merlin** dashed low across the landscape. As well as the flocks of cranes we located a rather distant group of **Great Bustards**. After coffee (and an outstanding chocolate!) at the Casa de Pensionista in the village of Vegas Altas, we paid a visit to Orellana reservoir, where there was a selection of duck present, such as **Pochard**, **Tufted Duck** and **Gadwall**, as well as about eight **Black-necked Grebes**. Passerines included numerous **Common Chiffchaff** as well as a **Rock Sparrow**.

At Moheda Alta we stopped at an embanked pool, which had small numbers of duck, mainly **Shoveler**, but on the fields to the south there were many hundreds **Grey Lag Geese**, including two **White-fronted Geese**. **Common Cranes** were numerous and overhead circled a large flock of **White Stork**.

Then we took the service road beside the Canal of the dehesas to Cubilar Reservoir, stopping to look at **Common Cranes** on the way. At Cubilar there were large numbers of duck, especially **Teal**, as well as a few **Egyptian Geese** and three **Ruddy Shelduck**. We made a final stop at the Sierra Brava reservoir, where there were huge rafts of **Shoveler**, including a leucistic one. The magnificent sunset tempted us to pause and admire it, and to watch a large roost of **Ravens** gathering.

11th December 2015: Lacañada Hide at Torrejón El Rubio and Aldea del Obispo.

Today was slightly cloudy first thing, but it brightened-up during the course of the day. We set off before dawn for our rendezvous with Pilar and Jesús who run the Lacañada Hide near Torrejón El Rubio. We settled in there by 08.30 and by first light there were already a crowd of **Azure-winged Magpies** coming down to the animal remains set out as bait. We were accompanied as well by a **Grey Wagtail** which periodically would be attracted to its reflection on the spy-glass of the hide. Whilst

Azure-winged Magpies and **Spotless Starlings**, as well as a few **House Sparrows** and **Crested Larks** pecked at the carcass, by 09.00 **Red Kites** started to make agile swoops into the arena, picking up fragments of food in their talons and barely touching the ground. A few minutes later the first **Griffon Vultures** settled in a nearby tree, with perhaps 25 present by 09.15. At 09.50, the first vultures (70 **Griffons** and two **Black Vultures**) were on the ground, but it took a full two more hours until the vultures moved in to feed. Whilst we and they waited, it was a good opportunity to study both species carefully, looking at the characters distinguishing age for example.

Within minutes there was an extraordinary frenzy, with birds piling in on top of each other, like a rugby scrum. It did not take long for the carrion to be almost completely consumed, leaving just skin and bones which were pecked-over by a dozen or so birds, half of which were **Black Vultures**.

By mid-afternoon, the final vultures had flown off and Pilar and Jesús came to collect us from the hide.

We then drove through *dehesa* woodland near the village of Aldea del Obispo to look for **Common Cranes**, eventually finding an obliging pair to photograph. We then went into the fine historic town of Trujillo to explore its medieval centre and have a drink in the Main Square. A **White Stork** had already taken occupancy of a nest.

12th December 2015: Plains of Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir

The day was calm and generally sunny and we headed south again, this time to explore the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. We quickly came across a party of **Great Bustards** and also had sightings of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** in flight. A **Peregrine** was sitting on a rock in the field. The fields held good numbers of **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover**, as well as numerous **Meadow Pipits** and larks (**Calandra**, **Crested**, **Thekla** and **Skylark**). **Common Chiffchaffs**, that most ubiquitous wintering species were also present along the fence-lines. At one point we watched female **Merlin** perched on a rock, then taking wing and heading off on its characteristic low and rapid flight. A couple of pools held a large number of duck, mainly **Mallard** and **Teal**, as well as five **Spoonbill**.

Beside the village of Campo Lugar, we watched a roost of **Stone Curlew**, with perhaps 60 birds present.

After coffee nearby, we spent the rest of the day at the new Alcollarín Reservoir. We had a picnic in the shade of holm oaks, where a **Firecrest** foraged, whilst on a tranquil pool nearby, there were a good selection of duck included a pair of **Ferruginous Duck** and a **Black-necked Grebe**. During our exploration of the site, we also found a party of seven **Glossy Ibis** as well as three **Common Shelduck**. At dusk, just before our return home, we had the good fortune of spotting an **Eagle Owl**, perched atop a massive granite boulder.

13th December 2015: Plains west of Trujillo, Almonte River, Talaván, Hinojal and Monroy Road.

It was a heavily overcast day and we used it for venturing on the plains west of Trujillo and north of Cáceres.

Starting just a few kilometres from Trujillo, we came across a flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, which almost immediately took to the wing, probably thanks to a passing **Raven**. Luckily we managed to relate most of the flock later and we good, albeit distant, views of both **Pin-tailed** and **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** on the ground. There were also several **Great Bustard** in view, as well as masses of small birds, whilst **Red Kites** were also seen in the area.

After a brief visit to the valley of the Tamuja River, we stopped for coffee just outside Cáceres and then headed north of the city to stop beside the River Almonte. Here immediately we found a fine male **Rock Bunting** and shortly afterwards a male **Black Wheatear**. A **Blue Rock Thrush** was also present, making it a very productive spot for this trio of rock-dwelling species.

Further north, we stopped beside the small reservoir of Talaván for our picnic. **Cetti's Warblers** sang from the marsh beside an old bridge and in the background we could hear **Common Cranes** trumpeting.

After lunch we made a foray onto the plains near Hinojal, where we found another party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, as well as a group of **Golden Plover**. We then returned in the direction of Trujillo, passing through Monroy, crossing the River Almonte again and then continuing on a narrow country road across open terrain. We came across another party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, as well as a group of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** on the ground.

14th December 2015: Rice fields of Palazuelo and Santa Amalia, Montánchez castle.

Forecast as the day with the most troublesome weather for birding: showers of rain and a strong breeze, we picked this day to return to the rice fields. We started near the village of Palazuelo and then headed west, finishing the morning near Santa Amalia.

Red Avadavats and **Common Waxbills** were in small flocks in the roadside ditches, whilst on the stubble fields and wetter, muddier fields there were small groups of **Common Cranes**, some of which allowed quite close approach. Most fields had **Lapwing**, **Black-headed Gulls**, **Meadow Pipits** and **White Wagtails**, whilst we also found a few **Water Pipits**. However, waders seemed to be very choosy, but after much searching we ended the morning with a good selection of species, especially **Kentish Plover**, **Ruff** and **Black-winged Stilt**. An overwintering **Yellow Wagtail** was an interesting find.

After lunch at the edge of Miajadas we then moved into a wholly different habitat: ascending the Sierra de Montánchez through fig orchards, cork and holm oak

dehesa and belts of Pyrenean Oak. At Montánchez we visited the castle, where on the exposed southern side, we felt the full force of the strong winds. Eventually we found what we were searching for with at least three **Alpine Accentors** feeding in a sheltered walled section of the castle. Other birds seen there included **Crag Martin** and **Blue Rock Thrush**.

15th December 2015: Plains west of Trujillo and Monfragüe National Park

There was an improvement in the weather, with generally light cloud and calmer conditions. We stopped first on the plains west of Trujillo for another attempt to find Little Bustard, which sadly did not oblige. However, a **Hoopoe** kindly provided Nancy great opportunities for photography. We then headed north to the Monfragüe National Park, its escarpments rising above the undulating *dehesas*. At the first stop at the massive cliff of Peña Falcon we were present as waves of **Griffon Vultures** rose from their roosts and wheeled in the first thermals of the day. We then proceeded to the viewpoint at Portilla del Tiétar, where many vultures were also present and here we watched birds returning to the cliffs bearing branches for their nests, copulating pairs and at least one bird which appeared to be incubating. The **Griffon's** breeding season was already underway. We were also hugely entertained by an **Otter** that on two occasions was fishing in the river in front of us, attracting too the attentions of a **Grey Heron**.

After our picnic there, we stopped at other sites in the park, including a belt of woodland where we saw **Hawfinch** and **Long-tailed Tits** and to admire the medieval Cardinal's Bridge, in its full glory with the water level of the River Tagus.

We made a final stop beside the Peña Falcon rock, where amongst the throngs of vultures, a **Peregrine** also passed and **Crag Martins** wheeled beside the rocky outcrops.

16th December 2015: Arrocampo, Valdecañas and return to Madrid

We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, after a spectacular sunrise and took the A5 motorway back in the direction of Madrid. As we approached the Tajo valley, there was a large bank of fog, but we pressed on to make our stop at the Arrocampo Reservoir, close to the village of Saucedilla. Here, as the mist lifted, we had a very productive morning's birding.

These included several excellent views of **Purple Swamphen**, very obliging **Penduline Tits**, **Marsh Harriers**, and **Common Snipe**. The *Typha* beds also held **Green Sandpiper**. A party of **Common Coot** foraged in the pool along with a female **Cetti's Warblers**, **Zitting Cisticolas** and **Common Chiffchaffs**, as well as four Bearded Tits. Brief views were also had of **Bluethroat** and **Reed Bunting**. At a second stop we had good views of two **Little Bittern**.

After coffee at the Casa de Pensionista at Saucedilla, we visited a small embanked pool, where as well as the selection of duck present, there were also three **Barn Swallows**, as well as **Common Stonechat** and **Black Redstart**.

We then moved to the Valdecañas dam nearby, ascending a small valley and had our picnic below a rocky outcrop. Here there was a wheeling mass of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, joined at one stage by a fine immature **Golden Eagle**.

It was quite difficult to draw ourselves away, but as the departure time approached, we headed off to Madrid. After a stop beside the Valdecañas Reservoir, where there were groups of **Common Crane**, **Grey Lag Geese**, two **Common Shelduck** and large numbers of **Wigeon**, we stopped for coffee halfway and then proceeded to Madrid, seeing **White Stork**, **Red Kite** and **Black-winged Kite** on the way. We arrived in excellent time for the check-in for the flight back to London.

Annotated List of Species Seen

Birds

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: Thousands present on rice fields at Moheda Alta on 10th December. Seen in flight over Campo Lugar on 12th. Also seen at Palazuelo and Valdecañas.
2. **White-fronted Goose**: Two present amongst Grey Lags at Moheda Alta on 10th December.
3. **Egyptian Goose**: At least 15 at Cubilar on 10th December and 100+ at Alcollarín on 12th December.
4. **Ruddy Shelduck**: Three at Cubilar on 10th December.
5. **Common Shelduck**: One at Cubilar on 10th December, three at Alcollarín on 12th and two at Valdecañas on 16th.
6. **Wigeon**: Large numbers at Alcollarín and Valdecañas.
7. **Gadwall**: Seen at all large water bodies.
8. **Teal**: Seen at all large water bodies.
9. **Pintail**: One at Moheda Alta pool on 10th December and several at Alcollarín on 12th.
10. **Mallard**: Seen on several days.
11. **Shoveler**: Seen at all large water bodies.
12. **Common Pochard**: Seen at Moheda Alta, Orellana and Alcollarín.
13. **Tufted Duck**: Seen at Orellana and Alcollarín.
14. **Ferruginous Duck**: A pair at Alcollarín on 12th December.

15. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen and or heard on several days.
16. **Little Grebe:** Seen most days.
17. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana.
18. **Black-necked Grebe:** At least eight at Orellana on 10th December and at least one at Alcollarín on 12th.
19. **Great Cormorant:** Seen most days.
20. **Little Bittern:** Two males seen and another heard at Arrocampo on 16th December.
21. **Cattle Egret:** Seen most days.
22. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
23. **Great Egret:** Seen most days.
24. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost every day.
25. **White Stork:** Seen daily, especially on the rice fields. At nests in Madrigalejo, Trujillo. Arrocampo and on way to Madrid.
26. **Spoonbill:** Five at Campo Lugar and two at Acollarín on 12th December.
27. **Glossy Ibis:** Seven at Acollarín on 12th December.
28. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily, over a hundred at Lacañada Hide.
29. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily, over twenty at Lacañada Hide.
30. **Golden Eagle:** One at Valdecañas Dam, on 16th December.
31. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
32. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
33. **Hen Harrier:** Males seen on 12th and 14th December with a female also seen on 14th.
34. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
35. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on 11th and 12th December.
36. **Black-winged Kite:** Four sightings on rice fields on 10th December and two seen on return to Madrid on 16th.
37. **Common Kestrel:** Seen daily.
38. **Merlin:** Seen on 10th, 11th and 12th December, on rice fields and plains.
39. **Peregrine Falcon:** One at Campo Lugar on 12th December and also in Monfragüe on 15th.

40. **Water Rail:** Heard on 12th December at Alcollarín, on 13th at Talaván and on 14th near Palazuelo.
41. **Moorhen:** Seen at Alcollarín and near Palazuelo.
42. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo on 16th December.
43. **Common Coot:** Present on all large water bodies.
44. **Common Crane:** Seen daily with hundreds present on rice fields.
45. **Great Bustard:** Distant flocks at Madrigalejo and Vegas Altas on 10th December, 55 seen at Campo Lugar on 12th, 40 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 13th and one at Campo Lugar on 14th.
46. **Black-winged Stilt:** Between 30-40 at Santa Amalia on 14th December.
47. **Stone Curlew:** About 25 near Madrigalejo on 10th and 60 at Campo Lugar on 12th December.
48. **Little Ringed Plover:** About 20 seen on rice fields on 14th December.
49. **Ringed Plover:** Six near Palazuelo on 14th December.
50. **Kentish Plover:** About 15 near Palazuelo and Santa Amalia on 14th December.
51. **Golden Plover:** Seen on all visits to rice fields and plains. About 60 seen on 12th at Campo Lugar.
52. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen daily and in good numbers on the plains and rice fields.
53. **Dunlin:** About 60 near Palazuelo on 14th December.
54. **Ruff:** About 15 near Santa Amalia on 14th December.
55. **Common Snipe:** Good numbers on the rice fields and also at Arrocampo.
56. **Greenshank:** One at Talaván on 13th December and single figures on rice fields on 14th.
57. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen almost daily.
58. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Orellana, Palazuelo and Arrocampo.
59. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen almost daily.
60. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
61. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Eight seen at Campo Lugar on 12th December and 20-30 west of Trujillo on 13th.
62. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** A total of over 100 seen at three locations on plain north-west of Trujillo on 13th December.
63. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.

64. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
65. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
66. **Eagle Owl:** One at Alcollarín on 12th December.
67. **Little Owl:** One calling at Casa Rural El Recuerdo on 10th December and one seen at Campo Lugar on 12th.
68. **Kingfisher:** Seen one several days.
69. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
70. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard at Campo Lugar and Monfragüe.
71. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo and near Campo Lugar.
72. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
73. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on plains and at Alcollarín.
74. **Woodlark:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente on 16th December.
75. **Skylark:** Seen on plains.
76. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost days.
77. **Barn Swallow:** 3-4 at Arrocampo on 16th December.
78. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
79. **Water Pipit:** Seen on rice fields near Palazuelo on 14th December and at Arrocampo on 16th.
80. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
81. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
82. **Yellow Wagtail:** One at Santa Amalia on 14th December.
83. **Wren:** Heard on a couple of days.
84. **Dunnock:** Heard at Monfragüe on 15th December.
85. **Alpine Accentor:** Two or three at Montánchez Castle on 14th December.
86. **Robin:** Seen almost daily.
87. **Bluethroat:** Two seen at Arrocampo on 16th December.
88. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
89. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
90. **Black Wheatear:** One at River Almonte on 13th December.
91. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Montánchez, Monfragüe and River Almonte.
92. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.

93. **Song Thrush:** Seen most days.
94. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen on two days.
95. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded almost daily.
96. **Zitting Cisticola.** Seen on most days.
97. **Dartford Warbler:** Recorded almost daily.
98. **Sardinian Warbler:** Heard and/or seen on most days.
99. **Blackcap:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Chiffchaff:** Seen every day in good numbers.
101. **Firecrest:** Seen at Alcollarín and Valdecañas.
102. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on several days.
103. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
104. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
105. **Bearded Tit:** Four at Arrocampo on 16th December.
106. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen at Montánchez and Monfragüe.
107. **Penduline Tit:** Two at Arrocampo on 16th December.
108. **Southern Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
109. **Jay:** Seen at Monfragüe and Valdecañas.
110. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
111. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
112. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
113. **Raven:** Seen every day.
114. **Common Starling:** Present on Campo Lugar plains on 12th December.
115. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
116. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
117. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen daily, with vast flocks on rice fields.
118. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen at on rice fields on 10th December.
119. **Rock Sparrow:** One at Orellana Reservoir on 10th December.
120. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
121. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
122. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.

- 123. **Serin:** Seen on several days.
- 124. **Greenfinch:** Seen daily.
- 125. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
- 126. **Siskin:** Seen or heard on three days.
- 127. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
- 128. **Hawfinch:** Seen on a couple of days, with good views at Monfragüe.
- 129. **Cirl Bunting:** A female at Alcollarín on 12th December.
- 130. **Rock Bunting:** A male at Rio Almonte on 13th December.
- 131. **Reed Bunting:** One at Arrocampo on 16th December.
- 132. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Other wildlife

Mammals

Red Deer

Fox

Otter

Butterflies

Small White

Clouded Yellow

Dragonflies

Common Darter