

BIRDING REPORT FOR FRANCES COLE AND JUDITH HOOPER

16th January – 21st January 2016

Birdingextremadura & Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Itinerary

16th January 2016: Monfragüe National Park

17th January 2016: The plains between Trujillo and Santa Marta de Magasca followed by the Belén Plains

18th January 2016: The Campo Lugar plains, rice fields near Palazuelo and Alcollarín Reservoir

19th January 2016: The Villuercas Mountains

21st January 2016: The rice fields near Madrigalejo, the Orellana Reservoir and Moheda Alta

16th January 2016: Monfragüe National Park

It was a fine crisp morning and it remained sunny and calm all day, with not a single cloud in the sky. We headed north, past Trujillo and across kilometre upon kilometre of *dehesa* landscape, the traditionally-managed wood pasture for which Extremadura is famous. Across undulating terrain, cut by deep river valleys, these holm oak woodland extended from horizon to horizon. This terrain was only interrupted by the appearance as we headed north of the quartzite ridge that marked the start of the Monfragüe National Park. This and the series of ridges to the north of it, was formed by massive folding. Through the ridge, where an old fault lay, the River Tagus had cut a huge gorge. This was where we made our first stop, watching **Griffon Vultures** coming and going from their breeding colony, with some birds seemingly already incubating, whilst others were busy bringing in nest material. This was mainly branches ripped from shrubs on the adjacent hillside.

We then moved to the northern side of the park, where a similar, but smaller gorge stood, the Portilla del Tiétar. The River Tiétar is a tributary of the Tagus and flowed in from the north, its catchments extending to the Gredos Mountains, which marked the northern horizon, their peaks covered in snow. As we walked up towards the Portilla, we spotted an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** soaring with a party of **Griffon Vultures**, the sun catching magnificently the pure white leading edge of the wing.

Here we also enjoyed the spectacular sight of the **Griffon Vultures** arriving with nest material, as well as watching passing **Black Vultures**. A **Blue Rock Thrush** also

appeared from time to time on a small outcrop. The bank beside the road had some early **Angel's Tears Narcissus** in flower.

After coffee at the edge of a cork oak grove, we retraced our steps through the park, stopping for lunch at another point beside the River Tiétar. A pause near a fascinating rock outcrop demonstrating impressive geology also produced a **Dartford Warbler**. We then stopped downstream from the confluence of the two rivers, where one could just make out below the water surface the medieval Cardinal's Bridge. A **Sardinian Warbler** called from the holm oak beside us and whilst we were watching it, Frances noticed distant raptor appear. It was a **Bonelli's Eagle** and as we watched, its mate arrived on the scene. We then had superb views of the pair slowly soaring in the clear blue sky. One bird then settled down a dead tree under the skyline of the ridge and we could watch it at length. **House Martins** were also hawking insects in the area.

We made a final stop beside the massive southern gorge again, with the vultures still very active. **Black Redstarts** and **Blue Rock Thrush** also provided diversion for us.

17th January 2016: The plains between Trujillo and Santa Marta de Magasca followed by the Belén Plains

A combination of being overcast with a light wind made it feel decidedly chilly today. We headed west from Trujillo, in the direction of Cáceres, veering north towards the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. We made our first stop at the edge of *dehesa* woodland, looking out on the undulating mixed farming plains which would be the focus of the day's birding. Here every field boasted **Lapwing**, and larks and **Corn Buntings** were also common. A noisy flock of **Spanish Sparrows** clustered around a cattle pen, with a few **House Sparrows** amongst them. Scattered bushes provided perches for **Iberian Grey Shrikes**, whilst on fence posts perched **Red Kite** and **Raven**.

We found a party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** feeding, pigeon-like on short sward in a meadow. We then proceeded along a wide dirt track, making a stop to check a large field where a rare visitor had been present. We were lucky enough to find the **Sociable Lapwing**, a visitor from the steppes of Central Asia and had excellent views of it feeding, as well as making short flights, showing its dramatically patterned black and white wings. Judith found a group of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** feeding nearby.

After coffee in Santa Marta de Magasca, we headed north, pausing briefly beside the River Magasca, before then returning to the plains. Here we encountered flocks of **Calandra Lark** and watched a fine male **Hen Harrier** feeding along the edge of a medieval drovers' trail. It was here where we had our picnic lunch.

After seeing a flock of over a hundred **Common Crane** in a field, we then returned to Trujillo, across the dramatic landscape of the granite outcrops, moving then onto the plains beyond the village of Belén. We found two **Little Owls**, one particularly obliging as well as getting more sightings of vast **Calandra Lark** flocks. As the afternoon closed,

more and more **Red Kites** appeared and we enjoyed the sight of five perched along fence posts.

18th January 2016: The Campo Lugar plains, rice fields near Palazuelo and Alcollarín Reservoir

It was another rather overcast day, but some of the cloud cover thinned-out during the day. Again therefore it was a fresh day, with a breeze during the afternoon. Today we headed south, crossing the divide between the Tagus watershed and that of the Guadiana and entering first of all the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. Here the very first bird we stopped to look at was a fine male **Great Bustard** and during the course of the morning we saw about dozen of these magnificent birds. Male **Hen Harriers** were watched quartering the fields and as always in this type of habitat there was a multitude of larks, **Lapwings** and **Corn Buntings**. On the western side of the plains we found a winter roost of **Stone Curlew**, about 60 birds in total, standing in a semi-comatose state, until at one point something startled them and they flew up (revealing their true number) and circled round. Some returned to the same roosting site, whilst others moved to adjacent fields.

We then descended to the vast irrigated arable lands where rice, maize, tomatoes and peaches are grown. After coffee, we drove to the village of Palazuelo where we had a picnic beside a *Typha*-filled channel, where **Red Avadavats**, **Cetti's Warblers** and **Common Chiffchaffs** were present.

Following lunch, we spent an hour or so scouring the muddy fields for waders and found a good range of species, especially **Kentish** and **Ringed Plovers**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Little Stint** and **Dunlin**. In a recently ploughed field there were hundreds of egrets, **Black-headed Gulls**, and dozens of **Grey Heron** and **White Wagtails**.

Finally, we moved on to the newly created Alcollarín Reservoir. Large numbers of duck were present (especially **Teal**, **Mallard**, **Shoveler** and **Wigeon**), with parties of **Pintail**, **Pochard** and **Tufted Duck**. At a smaller pool a **Ferruginous Duck** and female **Ring-necked Duck** was present with **Pochard** and **Tufted Duck**, as well as **Kingfisher** and numerous **White Wagtails**. We completed the day by moving to a far corner of the reservoir where we waited until dusk. We were fortunate enough to both hear and see **Eagle Owl**, perched wonderfully atop of a massive granite boulder. During our sighting it changed position twice, so as well as taking in its massive form, we had the chance of seeing its great wingspan.

19th January 2016: The Villuercas Mountains

Our plan to head further south into the Guadiana river basin was thwarted because of thick fog, so we moved instead to the Villuercas Mountains in the east. Throughout our journey there the fog persisted and it was only when we had climbed well over a thousand metres that we emerged above the fog bank and saw the extraordinary

topography of the Villuercas Mountains, the best example of its kind in Europe and declared a Geological Park. At the summit (1600 metres above sea-level) we could see how the fog whilst covering the Badajoz province had not spread into the northern part of Extremadura at all. The only birds we found there were somewhat special, about 15 wintering **Alpine Accentors**.

We then descended and visited the medieval ice house, a superb example of the structure where snow was stored to be then carried as ice down to the monastery of Guadalupe. Close by we parked and took a walk across the moorland onto a ridge where an old firebreak made walking a bit easier. **Mountain Crocuses** were in flower and in the scrub there were **Dunnocks**. But the most exciting find was a **Wallcreeper** which we watched moving on the side of a small outcrop, and then flying to a larger rock face where we lost sight of it.

Very pleased with this find, we returned to the car for our picnic and then drove from the mountain down onto the Almonte River. We followed the course of the river and stopped where it cuts through the western flank of the mountain range. Here we were enthralled by the sight of about 120 **Siskins** feeding on the alder cones beside the river. From the rocks above, **Griffon Vultures** wheeled and Frances spotted some yellow flowers which using the telescope at full zoom, we could identify as **Hoop Petticoat Narcissus**. To get a closer view we walked upstream and then veered up through a belt of holm oak and then into **Juniper** belt, where we finally reached the area where the narcissus was in flower. These were very early specimens. Finally, as we descended, we had good views of a **Dipper** beside the river.

21st January 2016: The rice fields near Madrigalejo, the Orellana Reservoir and Moheda Alta

We descended through a fog bank as we headed into the Guadiana watershed, but throughout the day we were below it. Thus the sky remained overcast throughout with spells of drizzle.

We started our birding south of the town of Madrigalejo, in an area of irrigated farmland (for rice, maize, tomatoes and orchards). Small parties of **Common Crane** were spread across the fields, and we quickly found a group of about ten **Great Bustard**. We searched for others, coming across another smaller party, close to which was a much bigger gathering of about 55 birds. These gave us the best views so far of this emblematic bird. We also came across a flock of about 20 **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. In the ditches there were groups of **Spanish Sparrow**, as well as **Red Avadavat** and **Common Waxbill**. Regular sightings were had of **Marsh Harriers** (indeed throughout the day) and we saw a female **Hen Harrier** as well. Along one of the tracks we came across a man collecting thistle stems and a wild chard. After coffee in the village of Vegas Altas, we then headed east to a bay of the Orellana Reservoir. After lunch, taking some shelter from a more persistent light rain, we took a short walk along the shore.

Black-headed Gulls hawked insects over the water surface whilst **Crag Martins** and **House Martins** were active higher up.

Amongst the rafts of duck, dominated by **Shoveler**, were some diving duck: **Tufted Duck** and **Pochard**, as well as a drake **Lesser Scaup**, now spending its second winter at this site. We obtained good views of this rarity. On the shore itself, there were groups of **Linnets**, **Meadow Pipits** and a **Common Sandpiper** feeding and we came across an obliging **Rock Sparrow**.

We then moved back westward, stopping at the Crane Reserve of Moheda Alta. From the hide there were large numbers of **Common Snipe**, as well as **Black-winged Stilt** and **Marsh Harrier**. Nearby we saw a **Black-winged Kite** and then we popped in to check a small embanked pool which was teeming with **Shoveler**. Amongst this throng was a beautiful drake **Garganey**. This was a fine sighting to conclude the day and after popping into the crane information centre, we then returned through the gathering mist to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

Annotated list of birds seen

1. **Greylag Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín.
3. **Common Shelduck**: 26 at Alcollarín Reservoir on 18th January.
4. **Wigeon**: Large numbers at Alcollarín.
5. **Gadwall**: Seen on all large water bodies.
6. **Teal**: Seen at all large water bodies.
7. **Pintail**: Seen at Alcollarín.
8. **Mallard**: Seen on most days.
9. **Garganey**: a drake present on pool at Moheda Alta on 21st January.
10. **Shoveler**: Seen on all large water bodies.
11. **Pochard**: Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana Reservoirs.
12. **Tufted Duck**: Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana Reservoirs.
13. **Ring-necked Duck**: Female at Alcollarín on 18th January.
14. **Lesser Scaup**: Drake at Orellana on 21st January.
15. **Ferruginous Duck**: One seen at Alcollarín on 18th January.
16. **Red-legged Partridge**: seen at Monfragüe on on the plains.
17. **Little Grebe**: Seen on pool in plains and at Alcollarín.
18. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana Reservoirs.
19. **Black-necked Grebe**: About ten seen at Alcollarín on 18th January.
20. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost daily.
21. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on rice fields on 18th and 21st January.
22. **Little Egret**: Seen on rice fields on 18th and 21st January.
23. **Great Egret**: Several at Alcollarín and on rice fields on 18th January.

24. **Grey Heron:** Seen most days.
25. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
26. **Spoonbill:** One at Alcollarín on 18th January.
27. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen at Monfragüe and in Villuercas Mountains.
28. **Black Vulture:** Seen at Monfragüe.
29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** One at Monfragüe on 16th January.
30. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Pair at Monfragüe on 16th January.
31. **Red Kite:** Seen daily in good numbers.
32. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on rice fields in good numbers.
33. **Hen Harrier:** Seen on plains and on rice fields, mainly males recorded.
34. **Common Buzzard:** seen most das.
35. **Sparrowhawk:** One seen on plains on 17th January.
36. **Black-winged Kite:** One at Moheda Alta on 21st January.
37. **Common Kestrel:** Seen daily.
38. **Merlin:** One seen very briefly on plains on 17th January.
39. **Peregrine:** One at Monfragüe.
40. **Moorhen:** Seen at Alcollarín.
41. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana reservoirs.
42. **Common Crane:** Seen daily.
43. **Great Bustard:** Twelve on Campo Lugar plains on 18th January and 70 near Vegas Altas on 21st.
44. **Black-winged Stilt:** Several at Moheda Alta on 21st January.
45. **Stone Curlew:** about 60 at Campo Lugar on 18th January.
46. **Little Ringed Plover:** About ten near Palazuelo on 18th January.
47. **Ringed Plover:** 30 near Palazuelo on 18th January.
48. **Kentish Plover:** 40 near Palazuelo on 18th January.
49. **Golden Plover:** Seen on plains and rice fields.
50. **Lapwing:** In good numbers very day.
51. **Sociable Lapwing:** One west of Trujillo on 17th January.
52. **Dunlin:** Several hundred near Palazuelo on 18th January.
53. **Little Stint:** about 30 near Palazuelo on 18th January.
54. **Common Snipe:** Good numbers on the rice fields.
55. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Two near Palazuelo on 18th January.
56. **Common Redshank:** One near Palazuelo on 18th January.
57. **Greenshank:** Seen on 17th and 18th January.
58. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on rice fields.
59. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Orellana Reservoir on 21st January.
60. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on several days.
61. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on several days.
62. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains on 17th January and on rice fields on 21st.
63. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains on 17th January.
64. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.

65. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
66. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
67. **Eagle Owl:** One watched at Alcollarín on 18th January.
68. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains on 17th and 18th January.
69. **Kingfisher;** two seen at Alcollarín on 18th and on rice fields on 21st January.
70. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
71. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard on one occasion.
72. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
73. **Crested Lark:** seen most days.
74. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on plains and Monfragüe.
75. **Woodlark:** Seen at Monfragüe and at Orellana Reservoir.
76. **Skylark:** Seen on plains and rice fields.
77. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
78. **Barn Swallow:** Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana.
79. **House Martin:** Seen most days.
80. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
81. **Water Pipit:** Seen on rice fields.
82. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on River Almonte on 19th January.
83. **Wren:** Seen at Monfragüe.
84. **Dipper:** Seen on River Almonte on 19th January.
85. **Dunnock:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains on 19th January.
86. **Alpine Accentor:** About 15 seen in Villuercas Mountains on 19th January.
87. **Robin:** Seen daily.
88. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
89. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
90. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
91. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
92. **Song Thrush:** Seen daily.
93. **Redwing:** Small flock over Casa Rural El Recuerdo on 16th January.
94. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded on rice fields.
95. **Zitting Cisticola:** Recorded on rice fields.
96. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen/heard most days.
97. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen most days.
98. **Blackcap:** Seen most days.
99. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen daily.
100. **Firecrest:** Brief views on two days.
101. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on several days.
102. **Crested Tit:** Heard in the Villuercas Mountains.
103. **Blue Tit:** Seen on several days.
104. **Great Tit:** Seen on several days.
105. **Wallcreeper:** One in Villuercas Mountains on 19th January.
106. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen most days.
107. **Jay:** Seen in Monfragüe.

108. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
109. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
110. **Raven:** seen daily.
111. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains.
112. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
113. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
114. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
115. **Rock Sparrow:** One at Orellana reservoir on 21st January.
116. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
117. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
118. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
119. **Serin:** Seen most days.
120. **Greenfinch:** Seen on two days.
121. **Goldfinch:** Seen on several days.
122. **Siskin:** Seen on several days. Flock of 120 at River Almonte on 19th January.
123. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
124. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Monfragüe.
125. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.