

SHORT WINTER BREAK EXTREMADURA FOR SALLY AND MARK

26th – 30th December 2017

Itinerary

26th December 2017: Transfer from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

27th December 2017: Monfragüe National Park

28th December 2017: Plains of Campo Lugar, Alcollarín Reservoir and rice fields near Palazuelo

29th December 2017: Plains west of Trujillo and north of Santa Marta de Magasca, followed by Belén Plains.

30th December: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid



Watching Little Bustards

Holiday Report

26th December 2017: Transfer from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

Sally and Mark arrived a few minutes ahead of schedule just before 21.00 at Madrid airport. Passport control and luggage pick-up was swift and soon we were heading off into the evening traffic on the southern part of the Madrid ring-road and then to the motorway south-west for Extremadura. There were a few periods of light rain on the way, but we managed the journey without the need to stop and reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo just before midnight.

27th December 2017: Monfragüe National Park

It was quite windy during the night and it remained breezy right through the day. However, for most of the day it was sunny so the conditions were excellent at the Monfragüe National Park. To get there we drove north from Trujillo, through a vast landscape of *dehesa*. A few **Red Kites** were seen first thing and parties of **Common Cranes** in the fields. During the morning we were accompanied by David Lindo (The Urban Birder) and some of his pals and most convivial it was too. We stopped first of all at the hugely impressive gorge of Peña Falcón, where a couple of hundred **Griffon Vultures** were soaring the sky, along with a few **Black Vultures**. From time to time a **Peregrine** circled with them, completely dwarfed.

At the little hamlet of Villarreal de San Carlos in the centre of the park, we found a mixed feeding party of finches at the carport, including **Linnets**, a **Greenfinch** and, most interestingly of all, a male **Citril Finch**. **Thekla Larks** fed beside them. **Black Redstarts** were also present. We then drove through the park to a northern viewpoint of the Portilla del Tiétar, where more vultures were present. Here we watched a male **Blue Rock Thrush** feeding on a crayfish. **Crag Martins** hawked insects over the top of the outcrop. Eventually a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** appeared in view, tantalizingly distant, wheeling high overhead with some vultures.

After coffee (where we had a high flyover from a **Bonelli's Eagle**) we returned to the Portilla del Tiétar and we rewarded by much better views of the eagle as well as an adult **Black Stork**. We had our picnic at the Tajadilla viewpoint, with both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** also constantly overhead.

We retraced our steps and stopped beside the Tagus River for a walk overlooking the old medieval Cardinal's Bridge. Small birds were evident such as **Long-tailed Tits**, **Blackcaps**, **Chaffinches** and brief views of **Hawfinch**. Finally, we ended our visit where we had started, at the Peña Falcon viewpoint, enjoying the sight of dozens of vultures overhead.

28th December 2017: Plains of Campo Lugar, Alcollarín Reservoir and rice fields near Palazuelo

The day dawned heavily overcast with drizzle. The rain cleared, but it was very windy the whole day, although we did have a few breaks in the cloud too. We headed south, through the town of Zorita and then onto the plains near Campo Lugar. At our first stop we found a group of about 15 **Great Bustard**, as well as seeing two in flight. Three **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flew close by. But it was the large number of small birds which were particularly impressive: **Skylarks**, **Calandra Larks**, **Meadow Pipits** and **Corn Buntings**. **Red Kites** and **Marsh Harriers** glided across the plains, and parties of **Common Cranes** crossed our view. **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were quite common on the fences.

We took a rough track, seeing several **Hoopoes** and, reaching two pools, we stopped to watch parties of duck: **Mallard**, **Teal**, **Wigeon**, **Pintail** and **Gadwall**. A **Spoonbill** was also busily feeding. We noticed a dark object in a bare tree and discovered that it was a **Golden Eagle**. We watched it at length until it flew off (having raised the interest of a **Marsh Harrier**), the white blazes on its wings and tail telling us that it was a young bird.

As we approached the village of Campo Lugar, we saw a **Cattle Egret** being harassed by a **Raven**, apparently trying to steal food from it. It forced the **Cattle Egret** to the ground, where it seemed trapped. Soon a second **Raven** appeared and then a **Marsh Harrier**. Concerned that it was perhaps ensnared on a fence we went to check. The egret was fine and flew off, seemingly none the worse for its ordeal.

Coffee was taken at a friendly bar just outside the village and from there we went to the nearby Alcollarín Reservoir. We had a picnic lunch beside a small pool, where throngs of **Chiffchaffs**, **White Wagtails** and **Crag Martins** hawked insects. A party of **Pochard** were present as well. We stopped near the dam and saw three species of grebe: **Little**, **Great Crested** and two smart **Black-necked**.

The afternoon was spent driving slowly through the rice fields near Palazuelo. Here we saw large numbers of Common Cranes and several egrets, but there were two main attractions. First the flocks of small birds: **Red Avadavats**, **Common Waxbills**, **Spanish Sparrows** and **Tree Sparrows**, and secondly were the waders. The **Dunlin** were the most numerous, but we were able to watch **Ringed**, **Little Ringed** and **Kentish Plovers** all in the same field. We also had excellent views of **Water Pipits**.



Red Avadavats

29th December 2017: Plains west of Trujillo and north of Santa Marta de Magasca, followed by Belén Plains.

It was damp and misty first thing, but once we had come off the hills onto the plains to the west of Trujillo, we were out of the mist and during the day the westerly winds brought periods of sunny spells, which were a welcome break from the otherwise heavily overcast conditions. We spent the first part of the morning on plains just outside Trujillo where we had magnificent views of nearly 50 **Great Bustards**, parties of **Pintailed Sandgrouse** in flight and several **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** on the ground. But perhaps best of all was the spectacle of a **Merlin** in pursuit of a **Meadow Pipit**, attracting the attention of another **Merlin**, which joined in the attack. It appeared that miraculously the **Meadow Pipit** escaped.

After coffee in the little village of Santa Marta de Magasca we paused at the top of a valley overlooking the Tamuja River. Several **Red Kites** and vultures cruised overhead. We then had our picnic beside the Magasca River, where before we had put sandwich

to mouth, we were watching a displaying pair of **Golden Eagles**. After lunch, we were then rewarded by a view of an **Otter**.

As we drove back up onto the plains, we stopped to watch an immature **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. Another was seen even closer and then we saw a fine adult perched on a rock under the watchful eye of a cow. A little further along the road we had excellent views of a hunting male **Hen Harrier**.



Spanish Imperial Eagle and cow

We then headed to the Belen plains to the east of Trujillo. Here we had wonderful views of a **Little Owl**, but most important was the discovery of a flock of 61 **Little Bustards** which we saw initially in flight and then enjoyed watching them on the ground, where they preened, rested and foraged. We ended the day with a short visit to admire the Main Square of Trujillo.



Little Owl

30th December: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid

The day was brighter than it had been over the last couple of days, with the clouds gradually breaking during the day. We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and took the A5 motorway towards Madrid. Passing the town of Almaráz, we headed towards the Arrocampo Reservoir. No sooner than we had approached, we saw our target species for the day: a superb **Black-winged Kite** perched on a roadside telegraph pole. Fortunately, there was a place to park off the road and we could enjoy prolonged views of this stunning bird as it perched, preened, flew between perches and hovered. A second bird was perched on a small bush not that far away.

We parked close to the edge of the marsh and spent an hour or so walking beside the **Typha** fringing vegetation. Here we could hear often the toy trumpet calls of **Purple Swamphens** (occasionally affording us glimpses as well) and **Cetti's Warblers**. **Chiffchaffs** were abundant. We stopped when we heard the thin, high-pitched calls of **Penduline Tits** and managed to see a male briefly several times. From the same spot

Mark spotted a **Wryneck** which was an excellent find. He also saw briefly a **Great Bittern** that had been disturbed by fisherman before disappearing in a nearby reedbed.

We saw our first **White Storks** of the holiday, whilst both **Kingfishers** and **Marsh Harriers** were seen several times. After coffee, we returned to another section of marsh, where as well as **Purple Swamphen** and **White Stork**, we also had good views of **Zitting Cisticola** and two **Bluethroat**.

It was then time to leave for Madrid. The journey on the motorway with very little traffic went according to plan, with sightings of more **White Storks** and many **Red Kites** on the way. Just before entering Madrid, a party of seven **Little Bustard** flew over the road. A nice surprise and a fitting conclusion to this short winter break.

List of Species

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Two beside pool near Campo Lugar on 28th December.
2. **Wigeon**: Seen on pool near Campo Lugar on 28th December.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen near Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir.
4. **Teal**: Seen near Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir.
5. **Pintail**: Four present on pool near Campo Lugar on 28th December.
6. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
7. **Shoveler**: Seen most days.
8. **Pochard**: Seen near Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir.
9. **Tufted Duck**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
10. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen at Monfragüe.
11. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
12. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín on 28th December.
13. **Black-necked Grebe**: Two seen at Alcollarín on 28th December.
14. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost every day.
15. **Great Bittern**: One seen briefly by Mark at Arrocampo on 30th December.
16. **Cattle Egret**: Seen most days.
17. **Little Egret**: Seen most days.
18. **Great White Egret**: Seen most days.
19. **Grey Heron**: Seen most days.
20. **Black Stork**: One at Monfragüe on 27th December.
21. **White Stork**: Several seen on 30th December.
22. **Spoonbill**: One adult on pool near Campo Lugar on 28th December.
23. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen most days.
24. **Black Vulture**: Seen most days.
25. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: One in Monfragüe on 27th and a total of four seen (three immatures and one adult) on plains on 29th December.

26. **Golden Eagle:** One near Campo Lugar on 28th December and a displaying pair on plains on 29th.
27. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Distant views of one near Monfragüe on 27th December.
28. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
29. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
30. **Hen Harrier:** Female seen on rice fields on 28th and a male on plains on 29th.
31. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost daily.
32. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen almost daily.
33. **Black-winged Kite:** Two at Arrocampo on 30th December.
34. **Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
35. **Merlin:** Two seen on plains on 29th December.
36. **Peregrine:** Seen at Monfragüe on 27th December.
37. **Water Rail:** Calling at Arrocampo on 30th December.
38. **Moorhen:** Calling at Arrocampo on 30th December.
39. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo on 30th December.
40. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
41. **Common Crane:** Seen daily in large numbers.
42. **Little Bustard:** 61 on Belen Plains on 29th and 7 over motorway near Madrid on 30th December.
43. **Great Bustard:** Seen on Campo Lugar Plains and about 50 on plains west of Trujillo.
44. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at Alcollarín on 28th December.
45. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields on 28th December.
46. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields on 28th December.
47. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on rice fields on 28th December.
48. **Golden Plover:** Seen almost daily.
49. **Lapwing:** Seen daily.
50. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields.
51. **Common Snipe:** Seen at Alcollarín and the rice fields on 28th December.
52. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín and the rice fields on 28th December.
53. **Common Sandpiper:** seen at Monfragüe and the rice fields.
54. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen every day.
55. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on Campo Lugar plains and west of Trujillo.
56. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** About 40 seen west of Trujillo on 29th December.
57. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
58. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen most days.
59. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
60. **Little Owl:** Two seen on plains on 29th December.
61. **Kingfisher:** Seen almost daily, mainly by Sally.
62. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
63. **Wryneck:** One at Arrocampo on 30th December.
64. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains on 28th and 29th December.
65. **Crested Lark:** Seen on three days.

66. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on three days.
67. **Skylark**: Seen on plains on 28th and 29th December.
68. **Crag Martin**: Seen on three days.
69. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen almost daily.
70. **Water Pipit**: Seen on rice fields on 28th December.
71. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen at Monfragüe on 27th December.
72. **White Wagtail**: Seen every day.
73. **Wren**: Seen at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
74. **Robin**: Seen almost daily.
75. **Bluethroat**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
76. **Black Redstart**: Seen almost daily.
77. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily.
78. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen in Monfragüe.
79. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
80. **Song Thrush**: Seen on two days.
81. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen in Monfragüe.
82. **Cetti's Warbler**: Singing at Arrocampo.
83. **Zitting Cisticola**: Several seen at Arrocampo on 30th December.
84. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen on several days.
85. **Blackcap**: Seen almost daily.
86. **Chiffchaff**: Seen daily.
87. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen in Monfragüe.
88. **Blue Tit**: Seen in Monfragüe.
89. **Great Tit**: Seen in Monfragüe.
90. **Penduline Tit**: One seen at Arrocampo on 30th December.
91. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
92. **Jay**: Seen in Monfragüe.
93. **Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpie**: Seen daily.
94. **Magpie**: Seen most days.
95. **Jackdaw**: Seen on two days.
96. **Raven**: Seen daily.
97. **Common Starling**: Seen on Campo Lugar plains.
98. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
99. **House Sparrow**: seen daily.
100. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen most days.
101. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on the rice fields on 28th December.
102. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on the rice fields on 28th December.
103. **Common Waxbill**: Seen on the rice fields on 28th December.
104. **Chaffinch**: Seen on two days.
105. **Serin**: Seen on two days.
106. **Greenfinch**: Seen almost every day.
107. **Citril Finch**: One with Linnets and Greenfinch in Monfragüe on 27th December.

- 108. **Goldfinch:** Seen most days.
- 109. **Siskin:** Seen in Monfragüe.
- 110. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
- 111. **Hawfinch:** Seen briefly in Monfragüe.
- 112. **Corn Bunting:** Seen on plains.

Also seen:

Otter

Fox

Red Deer