

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo
REPORT ON AUTUMN HOLIDAY FOR SUE AND ANGELA
Itinerary (8th November 2017 – 18th November 2017)

8th November 2017: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Arrocampo Reservoir.

9th November 2017: Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas, Orellana Reservoir and Moheda Alta.

10th November 2017: Plains of Santa Marta de Magasca

11th November 2017: Alcollarín Reservoir and Mérida

14th November 2017: Alange, Santa Amalia, Palazuelo and Sierra Brava

15th November 2017: Guadalupe, Pico de Villuercas, Cubilar and Sierra Brava

16th November 2017: Monfragüe National Park and River Almonte, Jaraicejo

17th November 2017: Portaje Reservoir, Talaván Reservoir, Monroy road to Trujillo

18th November 2017: Return to Madrid airport.



Trip Report

8th November 2017: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Arrocampo Reservoir.

Sue and Angela arrived at Madrid just ahead of schedule and at about 11.00 we were heading out in the autumnal sunshine on the ring-road south of Madrid, heading for the motorway to Extremadura. It was a very smooth run and even before leaving the outskirts of the city we had seen our first **Black Vultures** and **Red Kites**. During the journey we also added **White Stork**, **Griffon Vulture** and **Buzzard**, as well as a sizeable flock of **Lapwing** mixed with **Spotless Starlings**. We stopped for coffee about halfway through the journey, and then once in Extremadura, we had lunch beside the Information Centre for the Arrocampo Reservoir.



No sooner had we started our sandwiches did the show start. First was a magnificent **Black-winged Kite**, which we watched on and off for over an hour. Beside the marsh, was a gloriously tame male **Bluethroat**, whilst a gaudy **Migrant Hawker** perched on the reeds in front of us and **Marsh Harriers** added to the performance. We walked beside the marsh, getting views of **Purple Swamphen** and a young **Penduline Tit**. A small party of cranes circled overhead, as did a dozen or so **Black** and **Griffon Vultures**.

It was hard to tear ourselves away, but with the welcome thought of settling down in our rooms after the long journey in our minds, we completed the drive to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, arriving there just after 17.00.

9th November 2017: Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas, Orellana Reservoir and Moheda Alta.

A clear blue sky all day, although a fresh northerly wind at times made it chilly. We headed south, passing through the town of Zorita and then onto Madrigalejo. En route we saw a male **Hen Harrier** quartering the plains. We stopped first of all at the old railway station where we saw about 40 **Stone Curlew**, mostly in flight but several excellently on the ground, sometimes disturbed by a passing **Marsh Harrier**. Parties of **Common Cranes** were passing in all directions, a taster of what was to come. Then south of Madrigalejo we ventured onto an area of rice and maize stubble fields to watch flocks of hundreds of **Common Cranes** and some wonderful murmurations of **Spanish Sparrows**. Four **Great Bustards** were also seen. Good numbers of **Lapwing** and **Black-headed Gull** were also present.

We stopped whenever there were muddy fields, seeing waders such as **Common Snipe** and **Dunlin**. A **Black-winged Kite** was seen briefly passing overhead as we drove. After coffee in the village of Obando, we paid a visit to Orellana reservoir, where there was a selection of duck present including **Gadwall**, **Shoveler** and **Tufted Duck**, as well as at least three **Black-necked Grebes**. There were also in flower a few **Serotine Narcissus**. We had excellent views of both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** passing low overhead. We stopped at another point on the Orellana Reservoir, where the water level was very low. Here we had good views of **Thekla Lark**, **Meadow Pipit** as well as **Black-headed** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**. We stopped for lunch at the picnic area at Moheda Alta, having nice views of **Azure-winged Magpies**, and admiring the eruption of **Autumn Buttercup** in flower.



At a nearby pool, we found a juvenile **Greater Flamingo**, as well as several more duck species for the day, including **Egyptian Goose** and **Teal**. Then we stopped at a hide overlooking stubble where we watched more **Common Cranes** and **Greylag Geese**. And we were pleased with excellent views of **Great Egret**, **Black Stork**, **Hen Harrier** as well as a range of interesting waders, including **Wood Sandpiper** and **Spotted Redshank**. We drove back across the rice fields, seeing thousands of **Common Cranes** embarking on their pre-roost flights, as well as a field with good numbers of **Little Ringed Plover**, **Lapwing** and **Snipe**.



10th November 2017: Plains of Santa Marta de Magasca

Another clear and sunny day, and with less of a wind, meaning that it felt quite warm by the afternoon. We explored today the plains between Trujillo and Santa Marta de Magasca. At our first stop, we watched a large flock of **Spanish Sparrows**, along with a **Common Starling**, **Spotless Starlings** and **Corn Buntings**. A flock of **Azure-winged Magpies** entered the scene, until the arrival of a **Buzzard** which caused some commotion for a couple of minutes. We took a very productive walk down a track, finding very quickly four **Great Bustard** and a flock of 34 **Little Bustard**, with a large party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** in the same field of view. Along the track itself were **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Thekla Larks**. A little further on, we came across more **Great Bustards** (8 in fact), and enjoyed some good views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. Despite the plains initially looking barren, thanks to the prolonged drought that the region has suffered, it in fact turned out to be very full of birds.

After coffee in the village of Santa Marta de Magasca we stopped on a hillside overlooking the Tamuja River, just a dried watercourse. We then visited, to the north, the Magasca River, where we had our picnic. Here there was also always something

of interest in the sky, be it **Griffon** or **Black Vultures**, **Red Kites** or indeed a **Golden Eagle** which passed overhead. We were also treated to the wonderful sight of an **Otter** looking for fish in a pool and then walking along the dried-up river bank. As we left, just up the road, we stopped to watch a gathering of birds of prey including several **Red Kite**, both **vultures**, a **Buzzard** and best of all, two immature **Spanish Imperial Eagles**.

Further along we walked onto an ancient drovers' trail, seeing distant **Golden Plover** and parties of **Calandra Larks**. We then headed towards Trujillo.

In the Main Square amongst the **Crag Martins** was a **Red-rumped Swallow**. Angela and Sue then spent two hours exploring the historic centre of this beautiful small town.

11th November 2017: Alcollarín Reservoir and Mérida

It was a generally calm day, with plenty of sunshine and quite warm. After breakfast we headed south, stopping beside a tiny pond near the town of Zorita where we had lovely views of feeding **Greenshank**, **Black-winged Stilt** and **Common Sandpiper**. Nearby is the reservoir of Alcollarín and we spent the rest of the morning there. We stopped first of all at a small subsidiary pool, where we enjoyed watching flocks of **Shoveler** busily feeding, seemingly going around in circles, almost as if they were creating a vortex. There were also several **Great White Egrets** in view, as well as other ducks such as **Gadwall** and **Mallard**. Further along we had the opportunity to get good views of **Teal** and **Wigeon**. **Cormorant** were numerous. Around the reservoir were **Great Crested Grebe** and **Little Grebe**, amongst which we found two or three **Black-necked Grebes** as well. Birds of prey included **Marsh Harrier**, **Red Kite**, both **vultures**, **Common Buzzard** and two rather distant **Bonelli's Eagles**.

Small birds were not overlooked: we had lovely views of **Azure-winged Magpies**, **Chiffchaff**, **Stonechat** and **Crested Larks**.

After coffee, we then drove to Merida, through the more intensive agricultural belt where rice, maize, peaches and tomatoes are grown. At Mérida, Angela and Sue started their short city break.

14th November 2017: Alange, Santa Amalia, Palazuelo and Sierra Brava

Sue and Angela were collected at 10.30 at Mérida and we headed south to spend the morning walking beside the rocky outcrop of Alange, along a path beside the vast reservoir. **Crag Martins** foraged for insects at the wall of the dam and we had great views of **Black Wheatear** and **Blue Rock Thrush**. The wild olives were full of **Blackcaps** and **Sardinian Warblers**, whilst overhead **Griffon Vultures** drifted overhead.

After coffee at the edge of Alange town, we drove east towards the rice fields beyond Santa Amalia. Here we saw large numbers of **Common Cranes** and on each of the very few wet muddy fields, there were waders such as **Kentish Plover**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Dunlin** and **Little Stint**. We saw a young crane with colour-rings which

originated from Estonia. From there we continued east, and near the village of Palazuelo, had the wonderful sight of no fewer than three male **Bluethroats** feeding at the edge of a reed-filled ditch. More waders were present, especially good numbers of **Lapwing**. On one selection of fields, we also found a **Knot**, a local rarity.

Leaving the rice fields, we stopped beside the Sierra Brava reservoir and then the fields to the north. Here we had excellent views of **Little Owl**, as well as about a dozen **Great Bustard** and five **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**.

15th November 2017: Guadalupe, Pico de Villuercas, Cubilar and Sierra Brava

Today, yet another warm and sunny day, we drove south-east, past Cañamero, to head for the little monastery town of Guadalupe. Before stopping in the town itself, we stopped for a walk beside the Guadalupero River. It was a very attractive deep valley and we obtained superb sightings of **Crested Tit** and **Bullfinch**. Other birds gave more fleeting views, such as **Siskin** and **Firecrest**. At Guadalupe we had coffee in the Plaza Mayor and visited the basilica.

We then headed north, ascending the Villuercas Mountains north of Guadalupe. Taking an old narrow road, we rose initially through forested area of pines, and then plantations of **Sweet Chestnut** before getting into native belts of **Pyrenean Oak**. The autumn colours were truly magnificent and we continued the drive up to the peak of the Villuercas Mountains, at 1600 metres above sea-level. The views from the top were breath-taking and we also found a party of three to six wintering **Alpine Accentor**. But perhaps we were most entertained by the **Crag Martins** that whizzed past our heads in swoops over the peak. **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart** were also present. Descending we paused to visit to the Snow Well, a remarkable medieval structure over seven metres deep.

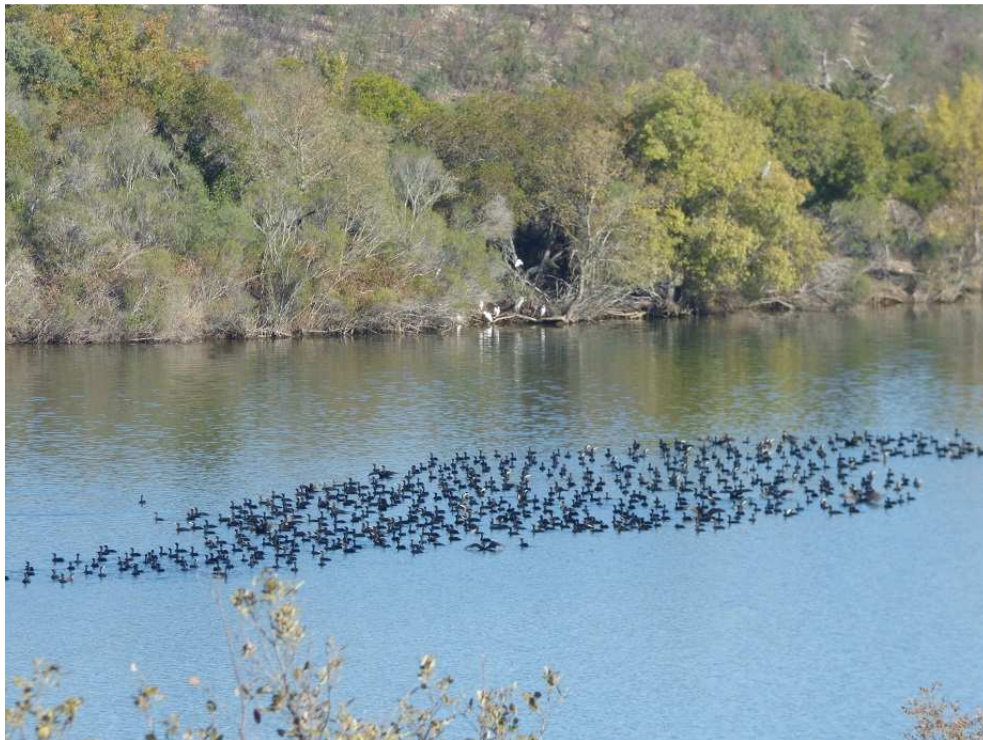


We then headed south of Guadalupe, back to lower ground, seeing throngs of **Common Cranes** in the fields and we stopped at the dam of the Cubilar Reservoir. Here we were rewarded by the sight of an **Osprey** arriving, carrying a fish, which it proceeded to eat whilst perched on top of a dead tree-stump, with cranes in the background. More and more **Common Cranes** arrived to roost there as the sun lowered in the sky. We then followed a service canal, onwards to the Sierra Brava reservoir, making a brief pause *en route* to watch geese and cranes feeding together. At Sierra Brava, at the western end of the island in view from the dam was a delightful juxtaposition of a **Greater Flamingo**, eight **Avocet** and four **Common Shelduck**.

16th November 2017: Monfragüe National Park and River Almonte, Jaraicejo

Another sunny day, with a slightly fresher north-easterly wind in the morning. We drove north of Trujillo, through the vast expanse of *dehesa* landscape, to the Monfragüe National Park. Our first stop was the Castle, which we reached along a walk that took us up to a ridge-top through wild olive groves. We started seeing vultures both above us and below us and from the viewing platform at the top of the ridge, had the chance not only to enjoy the vast panoramic view, but also more vultures. On one occasion they were joined by a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles**.

We then drove through the park, stopping to watch Red Deer, to our coffee stop, beside an area of cork oaks. Close-by was the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint where again we could watch **Griffon Vultures** at close range. We were also entertained by the incredible spectacle of 700 **Cormorants** being accompanied by **Little** and **Great Egrets** and **Grey Herons**.



We had started our return through the park when we stopped at a vantage point for another look at the Cormorants. From there we could see a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle** over the Portilla cliff face. A speedy return paid off, since we not only saw it soaring and gliding towards us, but also settle on the cliff top not far away, where it rested and preened. Magnificent!



We stopped for lunch in a belt of pines, seeing a **Brambling** in a group of **Chaffinches** and some very tame **Red Deer**. Returning through the park, we walked for a stretch along the Tagus River, having an excellent view of **Siskin** and **Hawfinch**. Finally we stopped opposite the impressive Peña Falcon cliff to enjoy more views of the vultures as well as **Blue Rock Thrush**.

On our way back home, we stopped beside the River Almonte (or its dried-up water course) where we had brief views of **Rock Sparrow** and a party of **Linnet**.

17th November 2017: Portaje Reservoir, Talaván Reservoir, Monroy road to Trujillo

Our final full day in Extremadura and it seemed even warmer than on earlier days (indeed the temperature reached 20°C). We drove first to the Portaje Reservoir north of Cáceres. Here amongst wintering **Grey Lag Geese** was a vagrant **Canada Goose**, a local rarity, Fine **Marsh Harriers** as well as both **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** were present in the skies and the reservoir held a few duck such as **Shoveler**, waders like **Dunlin** and **Greenshank**. As we were leaving we had excellent views of two **Woodlark**.

After coffee in the village of Hinojal, we stopped for our picnic beside the Talavan Reservoir, followed by a walk beside the site. Highlights here included a party of **Common Crane**, **Water Rail**, several **Common Snipe** and a particularly obliging **Thekla Lark**.

We then drove across the plains back to Trujillo, making a stop about half way to watch two **Black Vultures** and three **Red Kites** on the ground. As we watched them, soaring vultures overhead were joined by an immature **Egyptian Vulture** and our stop completed with the flourish of a **Golden Eagle** flying past at low altitude, This combination of fine birds of prey in the late afternoon light on the plains with dramatic mountains on the horizon, more than anything captured the essence of Extremadura.

18th November 2017: Return to Madrid airport.

We set off at 08.00 and had a smooth run back to the airport in Madrid, arriving there shortly after 10.30.

Annotated List of Species Seen

Birds

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: Seen on most days, on the rice fields and at reservoirs.
2. **White-fronted Goose**: Two with Grey Lag Geese near Sierra Brava on 15th November.
3. **Canada Goose**: One at Portaje Reservoir on 17th November.
4. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Moheda Alta, Alcollarin and Portaje.
5. **Common Shelduck**: Four at Sierra Brava on 15th November.
6. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín on 11th and at Sierra Brava on 15th November.
7. **Gadwall**: Seen at Arrocampo, Moheda Alta, Orellana, Alcollarín and Talaván.
8. **Teal**: Seen at Moheda Alta, Alcollarín and Talaván
9. **Pintail**: Several at Alcollarín on 11th November.
10. **Mallard**: Seen on several days.
11. **Shoveler**: Seen on almost all large bodies of water.
12. **Common Pochard**: Seen at Moheda Alta, Cubilar and Alcollarín.
13. **Tufted Duck**: Seen at Moheda Alta.
14. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen and or heard on two days.
15. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
16. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen on almost all large bodies of water.

17. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Orellana Reservoir and at least four at Alcollarín on 11th November.
18. **Great Cormorant:** Seen most days. The feeding concentration of over 700 birds at Monfragüe was one of the highlights of the week.
19. **Little Bittern:** Heard at Arrocampo.
20. **Cattle Egret:** Seen most days.
21. **Little Egret:** Seen almost every day.
22. **Great Egret:** Seen most days including six at Alcollarín on 11th November.
23. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost every day.
24. **Black Stork:** One at Moheda Alta on 9th November.
25. **White Stork:** Seen at Mérida and rice fields, especially on the rice fields. At nests on way to Madrid.
26. **Greater Flamingo:** One juvenile at Moheda Alta on 9th and one at Sierra Brava on 15th November.
27. **Egyptian Vulture:** An immature on the plains north of Santa Marta de Magasca on 17th November.
28. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
29. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
30. **Osprey:** One at Cubilar Reservoir on 15th November.
31. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Two immatures on the plains north of Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th and one at Monfragüe on 16th November.
32. **Golden Eagle:** One at Magasca River on 10th November and one on the plains north of Santa Marta de Magasca on 17th.
33. **Bonelli's Eagle:** A pair seen over Alcollarín on 11th and a pair at Monfragüe on 16th November.
34. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
35. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
36. **Hen Harrier:** A male seen near Madrigalejo on 9th November.
37. **Common Buzzard:** Seen every day in good numbers.
38. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on several days.
39. **Black-winged Kite:** One at Arrocampo on 8th and one near Vegas Altas on 9th November.
40. **Common Kestrel:** Seen daily.

41. **Peregrine Falcon:** One at Trujillo on 6th November.
42. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo and seen at Talaván.
43. **Moorhen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
44. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo on 8th November.
45. **Common Coot:** Present on all large water bodies.
46. **Common Crane:** Seen almost daily with many hundreds present on rice fields.
47. **Little Bustard:** 34 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th.
48. **Great Bustard:** Four near Vegas Altas on 9th November and 32 near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th and 12 near Sierra Brava on 14th.
49. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on several days in rice fields and at some reservoirs.
50. **Avocet:** 8 at Sierra Brava on 15th November.
51. **Stone Curlew:** About 40 near Madrigalejo on 9th November.
52. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on several days.
53. **Kentish Plover:** About 12 near Palazuelo on 14th November.
54. **Golden Plover:** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th November and on rice fields on 14th.
55. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen daily and in good numbers on the plains and rice fields.
56. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields on 9th and 14th November and also at Portaje.
57. **Little Stint:** One near Palazuelo on 14th November.
58. **Knot:** One near Palazuelo on 14th November.
59. **Common Snipe:** Good numbers on the rice fields and also at reservoirs.
60. **Spotted Redshank:** Seen at Moheda Alt and one at Alcollarin on 11th November.
61. **Common Redshank:** Seen on rice fields near Palazuelo 14th November.
62. **Greenshank:** Seen at most reservoirs and on rice fields.
63. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen at most reservoirs, rivers and on rice fields.
64. **Wood Sandpiper:** One at Moheda Alta on 9th November and one near Palazuelo on 14th.
65. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange.

66. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen almost daily.
67. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on most days.
68. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Six seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th November and five near Sierra Brava on 14th.
69. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** About 40 seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca on 10th November.
70. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
71. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen in Villuercas and Monfragüe.
72. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
73. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains near Sierra Brava.
74. **Long-eared Owl:** Heard calling at Pago de San Clemente on 9th and 11th November.
75. **Kingfisher:** Seen on several days.
76. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
77. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard in Monfragüe and Villuercas.
78. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo.
79. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost daily.
80. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on several days on plains and at Alcollarín.
81. **Woodlark:** A pair at Portaje on 17th November.
82. **Skylark:** Seen on several days.
83. **Crag Martin:** Seen nearly every day.
84. **Barn Swallow:** One seen at Arrocampo on 8th November.
85. **Red-rumped Swallow:** One in Trujillo on 10th November.
86. **House Martin:** Seen at Alange on 14th November.
87. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
88. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on Magasca River and in Villuercas.
89. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
90. **Wren:** Seen on a couple of days.
91. **Dunnock:** Seen on Villuercas Mountains on 15th November.
92. **Alpine Accentor:** Three to six at Pico de Villuercas on 15th November.
93. **Robin:** Seen almost daily.

94. **Bluethroat:** One seen at Arrocampo on 8th November and three on rice fields near Palazuelo on 14th.
95. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
96. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
97. **Black Wheatear:** Three seen at Alange on 14th November.
98. **Northern Wheatear:** One at Arrocampo on 8th November.
99. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe and Pico de Villuercas.
100. **Blackbird:** Seen almost daily.
101. **Song Thrush:** Seen almost days.
102. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen near Zorita and north of Trujillo.
103. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded on three days.
104. **Zitting Cisticola.** Seen on three days.
105. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on two days.
106. **Sardinian Warbler:** Heard and/or seen on several days.
107. **Blackcap:** Seen on several days.
108. **Chiffchaff:** Seen every day in good numbers.
109. **Firecrest:** Seen near Guadalupe on 15th November.
110. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on several days.
111. **Crested Tit:** Seen near Guadalupe on 15th November and Monfragüe.
112. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
113. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
114. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded near Guadalupe.
115. **Penduline Tit:** One seen at Arrocampo on 8th November.
116. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
117. **Jay:** Seen in Villuercas and Monfragüe.
118. **Azure-winged Magpie:** Seen daily.
119. **Magpie:** Seen almost daily.
120. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
121. **Raven:** Seen almost every day.
122. **Common Starling:** One on plains west of Trujillo on 9th November.

- 123. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
- 124. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
- 125. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily, with vast flocks on rice fields.
- 126. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields, with flocks at Palazuelo on 14th November.
- 127. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at River Almonte on 16th November.
- 128. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
- 129. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
- 130. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
- 131. **Brambling:** One in Monfragüe on 16th November.
- 132. **Serin:** Seen on a couple of days.
- 133. **Greenfinch:** Seen at Alange.
- 134. **Goldfinch:** Seen on several days.
- 135. **Siskin:** Seen or heard almost every day.
- 136. **Linnet:** Seen on several days.
- 137. **Hawfinch:** Seen on a couple of days.
- 138. **Bullfinch:** Two seen near Guadalupe on 15th November.
- 139. **Reed Bunting:** One at Arrocampo on 8th November.
- 140. **Cirl Bunting:** Singing at River Magasca on 10th November.
- 141. **Rock Bunting:** One seen in Monfragüe.
- 142. **Corn Bunting:** Seen on several days.

Other wildlife

Small White

Mammals

Dragonflies

Red Deer

Migrant Hawker

Otter

Common Darter

Herptiles

Pond Terrapin

Butterflies

Red Admiral

River Almonte in November 2015 and 2017

