

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR HAIFA AND BADER
AN INTRODUCTION TO WINTER BIRDING IN EXTREMADURA
Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura
26th November – 3rd December 2018

Itinerary

- 26th November 2018:** Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo
- 27th November 2018:** Rice fields at Puebla de Alcollarín and Alcollarín Reservoir
- 28th November 2018:** Monfragüe National Park, Almonte River and plains north of Trujillo
- 29th November 2018:** Sierra Brava Reservoir, Campo Lugar Plains, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Orellana Reservoir
- 30th November 2018:** The plains west of Trujillo and Trujillo town.
- 1st December 2018:** Monfragüe National Park
- 2nd December 2018:** Alange, Mérida and Santa Amalia rice fields
- 3rd December 2018:** Transfer to Cáceres



Trip Report

26th November 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Haifa and Bader arrived at about 12.20, and by 13.30 we were leaving Terminal 1 of Madrid airport and heading through the early afternoon traffic on the ring road westwards. It is easy going and before long we were on the A5 motorway towards Extremadura. We made a stop for refreshments halfway through the journey, having already seen **White Stork** and **Crested Lark**. After the break we continued in the fading early winter light, to reach Casa Rural El Recuerdo with time to settle in before dinner.

27th November 2018: Rice fields at Puebla de Alcollarín and Alcollarín Reservoir



Eurasian Penduline Tit

It was a beautiful early winter's day: blue skies, not a breath of wind, sunshine and wisps of early morning mist. We spent the morning on the rice fields near the village of Puebla de Alcollarín. Both **Common Crane** and **White Stork** were present in numbers and the sound of the trumpeting call of cranes was a constant background to us. Where tractors had worked the fields there were large numbers of **Cattle Egrets** and **Black-headed Gulls**. Flocks of **Northern Lapwings** were present, as were dense groups of

Spanish Sparrow. We had excellent views of a pair of **Eurasian Penduline Tits** feeding on reed mace seed heads, as well as small flocks of **Zitting Cisticola** and **Common Waxbill**. A nearby **Southern Grey Shrike** at one moment caused agitation amongst the small birds, which interrupted their foraging to perch at the top of the reeds and give alarm calls.



After coffee near the village of Campo Lugar we moved to Alcollarín Reservoir for our picnic and where we stayed the whole afternoon. The conditions were perfect with the only ripple on the water's surface made by **Great Crested Grebes** as they cruised past. The multitude of ducks formed a vast raft in the centre of the reservoir and were mainly asleep. Most of them were **Northern Shoveler**. As well as enjoying the variety of duck species present, we also watched **Meadow Pipits** bathing and a group of **European Greenfinches** foraging beside the water.

28th November 2018: Monfragüe National Park, Almonte River and plains north of Trujillo

We headed north of Trujillo, through a vast landscape of *dehesa*, reaching the rocky escarpments of the Monfragüe National Park. We made the ascent to the Castle,

shrouded in mist which enveloped the hillside. The lighting on the mossed-covered hillside was extraordinary and although not many birds were active, the visit was truly atmospheric. We then went down to the Peña Falcon viewpoint. Here although mist still topped the crag, we saw **Griffon Vultures** in flight and perched on rocks, some nearby. Birds like **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart** were also present.



After coffee, we elected to leave the park and head for blue skies and sunshine which we found beside the River Almonte where we had an enjoyable picnic lunch. Vultures again were much in evidence, soaring overhead, but smaller birds like **European Robins** and **Common Chiffchaff** were also present.

The afternoon was spent on the vast plains north of Trujillo, where, in contrast to the first few hours of the day, we saw huge numbers of birds: large flocks of **Northern Ravens** and smaller birds like **Spanish Sparrows** and **Rock Sparrows**, **European Goldfinches**, as well as parties of **Little Bustard** and **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**.

29th November 2018: Sierra Brava Reservoir, Campo Lugar Plains, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Orellana Reservoir

Another calm and fine day, which we started by visiting the Sierra Brava Reservoir. Here we had superb views of a roosting **Eurasian Eagle Owl**. There were thousands of ducks on the reservoir, mainly **Northern Shoveler**, but we also saw **Northern Pintail** and **Common Shelduck**. There was a constant backdrop of sound of **Common Cranes**, which would accompany us pretty much throughout the whole day.

We then drove across part of the Campo Lugar plains where we saw several **Great Bustard** and had great views of **Calandra Lark**, **Spanish Sparrow** and **Northern Lapwings**. After coffee in Madrigalejo we spent the rest of the morning in the rice fields, watching thousands of **Common Cranes**. We repaired to the Orellana Reservoir for lunch where there was an overwintering **Whiskered Tern**, feeding daintily on insects along with **Black-headed Gulls**.



Common Cranes

Back on the rice fields in the afternoon, we enjoyed yet more hundreds of **Common Cranes**, saw a **Eurasian Curlew** and also hundreds of wintering **Grey Lag Geese**.

30th November 2018: The plains west of Trujillo and Trujillo town.

There was heavy rain the previous evening and the day dawned cool and misty, but as we headed west of Trujillo onto the plains, we found ourselves well below the mist and soon under blue skies and enjoying sunshine, although the breeze stayed quite fresh.

We explored the plains west of Trujillo, seeing five **Great Bustards** at our first stop as well as lovely views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** on the ground. South of Santa Marta de Magasca village we had brief views of a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** perched on a pylon and then more prolonged views, albeit distant, as they soared over the trees.

The plains north of the village were also productive with a sighting of an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. As well as excellent views of **Red Kite** and both **Griffon** and **Cinereous Vultures**. Iberian Hares entranced us with their antics as three chased each other, completely oblivious to our presence.

We spent the afternoon visiting the beautiful and historic town of Trujillo, with buildings spanning over a thousand years. The birds were of interest too, with a **Griffon Vulture** flying low overhead, **Eurasian Crag Martins** and an overwintering **Red-rumped Swallow**.



1st December 2018: Monfragüe National Park

It was another beautiful day, although at times with a fresh westerly breeze. We returned to the Monfragüe National Park, this time starting in the northern end at the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. To our north stood the snow-clad Gredos Mountains, a backdrop to the wide Tiétar valley. In front of us a large cliff, where **Griffon Vultures** preened, and enjoyed the sunshine. Parties of **Little Egrets** flew past and we saw a **Blue Rock Thrush**. Eventually one of our target species appeared: an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. It flew from a tree and soared a few times before heading off to hunt.

After a coffee in a beautiful cork oak grove, we continued through the park. We had our picnic opposite another rock face, the Tajadilla. Here **Cinereous Vultures** almost outnumbered **Griffon Vultures** in the sky above us and we obtained wonderful views. At one time a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** appeared and circled amongst the vultures.

We finished our stay at the huge rock face at Peña Falcon, where indeed we watched a **Peregrine Falcon**, but again it was the vultures that stole the show. This time **Griffon Vultures**, passing us incredible close as they returned to the colony.

2nd December 2018: Alange, Mérida and Santa Amalia rice fields



Black-winged Stilts

We set off in mist, but by the time we reached the car park beside the dam of the Alange Reservoir, the light breeze and sunshine was starting to clear the sky. We had a very pleasant walk with the reservoir on one side and the impressive rocky outcrops, with flanks covered by olives and scrub on the other. There were masses of small birds, especially **Eurasian Blackcaps**. We enjoyed watching throngs of **Eurasian Crag Martins** and **Common House Martins** resting on the side of the rocks and wheeling overhead. We also had excellent views of three **Black Wheatears**.

After coffee, we made the short distance north to Mérida, passing occupied **White Stork** nests on the way. At Mérida we had our picnic beside the Guadiana River and then walked along the Roman Bridge which spans the river. Here the highlight was a lovely view of a **Common Kingfisher**. We also saw **Eurasian Coot** and **Common Moorhen**, **Great Cormorants** and **Grey Heron**.

From Mérida we returned to base via the rice and maize fields near Santa Amalia. By now we were enjoying beautiful afternoon sunshine. There were thousands of **Common Cranes**. We were mesmerised by a huge flock of **Spanish Sparrows** which weaved and turned in a spiral over an unharvested rice field, sometimes disappearing in the crop and then erupting from it making a sound like waves on a shingle beach. There was also a gorgeous flock of **Black-winged Stilts**, over 300 in all and we found a group of the very endearing **Kentish Plovers**.

Western Cattle Egrets amused us as they rode on the backs of sheep which grazed in a field beside the road.

As we returned, **Western Marsh** and **Hen Harriers** were coming out to hunt and the sky started to fill with the evening movements of the **Common Cranes**.

3rd December 2018: Transfer to Cáceres

A day with heavy fog, with did not lift. We set off from Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 10.00 and spent the morning visiting the historic city of Cáceres. After a pleasant lunch in the Main Square, we headed to the bus station, where Haifa and Bader caught the bus to Seville, thus completing their holiday in Extremadura.

List of birds seen

1. **Greylag Goose**: Flocks on rice fields on 29th November.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November.
3. **Eurasian Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November.
4. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November and Orellana on 29th.
5. **Eurasian Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November and Orellana on 29th.
6. **Mallard**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November and Orellana on 29th.

7. **Northern Pintail:** Seen at Sierra Brava on 29th November.
8. **Northern Shoveler:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November and Orellana on 29th.
9. **Common Pochard:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November and Orellana on 29th.
10. **Tufted Duck:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November and Orellana on 29th.
11. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on plains.
12. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November and Orellana on 29th.
13. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November and Orellana on 29th.
14. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir on 27th November.
15. **Great Cormorant:** Seen most days.
16. **Western Cattle Egret:** Seen most days.
17. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
18. **Great Egret:** Seen on rice fields.
19. **Grey Heron:** Seen most days.
20. **White Stork:** Seen most days.
21. **Red Kite:** Seen most days.
22. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen most days.
23. **Cinereous Vulture:** Seen most days.
24. **Western Marsh Harrier:** Seen most days.
25. **Hen Harrier:** Seen at Santa Amalia on 2nd December.
26. **Common Buzzard:** Seen most days.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on plains on 30th November and Monfragüe on 1st December.
28. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Seen on plains on 30th November and Monfragüe on 1st December.
29. **Common Kestrel:** Seen most days.
30. **Peregrine Falcon:** Seen at Monfragüe on 1st December.
31. **Common Moorhen:** Seen at Mérida on 2nd December.
32. **Eurasian Coot:** Seen on reservoirs and at Mérida.
33. **Common Crane:** Seen every day.
34. **Little Bustard:** Seen on plains on 28th November.
35. **Great Bustard:** Seen on plains on 30th November.
36. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on rice fields.
37. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
38. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
39. **European Golden Plover:** Seen on rice fields and plains.
40. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen every day.
41. **Ruff:** Seen on rice fields.
42. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields.

43. **Little Stint:** Seen on rice fields.
44. **Common Snipe:** Seen on rice fields.
45. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
46. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on rice fields.
47. **Common Greenshank:** Seen on rice fields.
48. **Black-headed Gull:** seen almost every day.
49. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on rice fields.
50. **Whiskered Tern:** Seen at Orellana on 29th November.
51. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains on 30th November.
52. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains on 28th November.
53. **Rock Dove:** Seen at Monfragüe.
54. **Common Wood Pigeon:** Seen at Monfragüe.
55. **Eurasian Collared Dove:** Seen every day.
56. **Eurasian Eagle Owl:** Seen at Sierra Brava on 29th November.
57. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains on 30th November.
58. **Common Kingfisher:** Seen at Mérida on 2nd December.
59. **Eurasian Hoopoe:** Seen every day.
60. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
61. **Crested Lark:** Seen every day.
62. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on plains and at Alange on 2nd December.
63. **Eurasian Skylark:** Seen on plains.
64. **Eurasian Crag Martin:** Seen at Monfragüe, Trujillo and Alange.
65. **Common House Martin:** Seen at Alange on 2nd December.
66. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen at Alange.
67. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen on plains and rice fields.
68. **Water Pipit:** Seen on rice fields.
69. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on rice fields.
70. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost every day. British form with black back seen at Sierra Brava.
71. **Common Blackbird:** Seen most days.
72. **Song Thrush:** Seen most days.
73. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen on rice fields.
74. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen on rice fields.
75. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen at Alange.
76. **Eurasian Blackcap:** Seen most days.
77. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen most days.
78. **European Robin:** Seen most days.
79. **Black Redstart:** Seen most days.
80. **European Stonechat:** Seen every day.
81. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Alange on 2nd December.
82. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe and Alange.
83. **Eurasian Blue Tit:** Seen on several days.
84. **Great Tit:** Seen on several days.

85. **Eurasian Penduline Tit:** Seen on rice fields on 27th November.
86. **Southern Grey Shrike:** Seen on rice fields and plains.
87. **Eurasian Jay:** Seen at Monfragüe.
88. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen every day.
89. **Eurasian Magpie:** Seen every day.
90. **Western Jackdaw:** Seen at Mérida.
91. **Northern Raven:** Seen most days. Big flocks on the plains.
92. **Spotless Starling:** Seen every day.
93. **Common Starling:** Seen on plains.
94. **House Sparrow:** Seen every day.
95. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost every day. Usually in big flocks.
96. **Eurasian Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
97. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on plains on 28th November.
98. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
99. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
100. **Common Chaffinch:** Seen in Monfragüe.
101. **European Serin:** Seen in Monfragüe.
102. **European Greenfinch:** Seen on plains and Alange.
103. **European Goldfinch:** Seen on plains and rice fields.
104. **Common Linnet:** Seen on several days.
105. **Corn Bunting:** Seen on plains and rice fields.