

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR MURIEL AND NIGEL
Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura
6th – 14th November 2018

Itinerary

6th November 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

7th November 2018: Rice fields at Palazuelo and Vegas Altas, Orellana Reservoir at Casas de Don Pedro and Orellana de Vieja

8th November 2018: Campo Lugar Plains and Alcollarín Reservoir

9th November 2018: La Cañada Hide and Monfragüe National Park

10th November 2018: The plains west of Trujillo, the River Almonte and Talaván Reservoir

11th November 2018: Sierra Brava reservoir, the rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, Cubilar Reservoir

12th November 2018: Arrocampo, Belén Plains and Trujillo

13th November 2018: Madrigalejo, Guadalupe, Pico de Villuercas, River Almonte, Belén Plains

14th November 2018: Valdecañas Reservoir and return to Madrid



Trip Report

6th November 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Muriel and Nigel arrived at 15.15, a quarter of an hour early and so before 16.00 we were leaving the Terminal 1 of Madrid airport and heading through the late 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 coffee halfway through the journey, having already seen **White Stork** and **Red Kite**. After the break we continued in the fading light, to reach Casa Rural El Recuerdo with time to settle in before dinner.

7th November 2018: Rice fields at Palazuelo and Vegas Altas, Orellana Reservoir at Casas de Don Pedro and Orellana de Vieja



It rained heavily during the night, but by the time we set off at 09.00, it was easing and even some patches of blue sky were evident. We set off southwards to explore the rice fields near the village of Palazuelo. Here the rice harvest was almost complete and some of the stubble fields were being “mashed-up” whilst others had large flocks of **Common Cranes**. During the morning we explored this habitat, watching throngs of

gulls and egrets behind tractors, feasting on frogs. We sat and watched a splendid male **Red Avadavat**, in full breeding plumage, collecting material for its nest. There was an interesting selection of waders too: including **Kentish, Ringed** and **Little Ringed Plover** in the same small field. Numerous **Marsh Harriers** were seen, as well as a couple of male **Hen Harriers** and a fine female **Sparrowhawk**.

We had our picnic beside a small bay of the Orellana reservoir which was full of a good variety of duck, including **Tufted Duck, Pochard** and many **Shoveler**. Three **Black Storks** stood at the bank, alongside **Great Egret** and **Grey Heron** watching foraging **Great Cormorants** (we later found a further six **Black Stork** at the other side of the bay). At one point a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** that we had earlier watched rather distantly, reappeared and made a shallow stoop to terrify all of the duck and gulls on the water.

We then visited another bay, where we found a beautiful group of 15 **Red-crested Pochard**. We returned to the rice fields for a further hour or so of watching the gulls and egrets following a tractor, while the trumpeting of **Common Cranes** was an unbroken sound in the background.

8th November 2018: Campo Lugar Plains and Alcollarín Reservoir

There was rain again before dawn, but it remained dry although overcast most of the morning. We then had heavy rain in the middle of the day, a short respite in the afternoon, before more rain as we returned to base.

We spent a very productive morning slowly crossing the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. At our first stop we found a group of **Great Bustard** and **Little Bustard** feeding together and saw several small groups of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. There were large numbers of **Calandra Larks, Skylarks, Meadow Pipits, Corn Buntings** and **Common Starlings** feeding on the plains, as well as the ubiquitous **Lapwings**.

Two surprises were a late **Northern Wheatear** and three very late **Lesser Kestrels** (two males and a female).

At a couple of pools, there were a good range of duck, including **Wigeon** and **Pochard**, as well as **Common Sandpiper** and egrets.

After coffee near the village of Campo Lugar, we headed to the Alcollarín reservoir. It was raining heavily when we arrived and so we drove straight to the picnic area and sat in the car waiting for it to ease. On a small pool were feeding **Cormorants, Great Egrets** and a **Kingfisher**. During a short interlude, we set out the picnic in the back of the vehicle and started our lunch waiting in the car. From the car, Martin noticed a wader actively feeding at the shore-line of the main lake which looked a bit odd. Braving the rain to set up his scope, it was quickly identified as an adult **Grey Phalarope**, a very unusual bird here. The rain started to pelt down very heavily so we finished our lunch,

but as soon as it eased, Nigel and Martin got a bit closer to the bird in order to get some photographs. It was delightful to watch as it fed spinning in the water, sometimes beside egrets, **White Wagtails** or **Little Ringed Plovers**, and once a **Kingfisher** flew directly in front of it. We re-joined Muriel to watch the bird from closer to the car, just in time to see a **Black Stork** land and stand in the same field of view as the phalarope – something that cannot happen very often!

We spent the rest of the afternoon, checking the rest of the reservoir seeing large numbers of duck and **Great Crested** and **Little Grebes**, as well as getting great views of **Thekla Larks**.

Just as we were finishing, the sky which had blackened erupted with a very heavy rainstorm, an apt time to head back to El Recuerdo.



Grey Phalarope

9th November 2018: La Cañada Hide and Monfragüe National Park

The day dawned clear-skied and we had a wonderful sunny morning, with clouds developing during the afternoon. The weather matched our plans perfectly since the morning was booked at the hide of La Cañada, near Torrejón el Rubio. We met Jesús at the edge of the town and followed him to the hide (a converted outbuilding) just a few

kilometres away. Within minutes of settling in we were enjoying groups of **Azure-winged Magpies** arriving and we did not have to wait for long until vultures started arriving, numerous **Griffon Vultures** and up to ten **Black Vultures**. We were also rewarded by the appearance of an adult **Egyptian Vulture**, which was quite unexpected. Supporting cast included a pair of feisty **Ravens**, a relaxed **Red Kite** and a host of small birds like **Spotless Starlings**, **Crested Lark** and **Grey Wagtail**.



Egyptian Vulture

After the session was over, we stopped for coffee at Torrejón el Rubio and then entered the Monfragüe National park, heading straight to the northern side to stand at the Portilla del Tiétar rockface. Here we saw **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** again and large parties of **Great Cormorant** passing along the river. A pair of **Black Stork** were seen soaring over the valley. Just before we had planned to leave, a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** made an appearance, from the north, speeding against a blue sky in a descent to perch out of view.

We headed to a viewpoint surrounded by pines for our picnic, where there were small birds including a group of **Crossbills**, as well as **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Nuthatch** and **Black Redstart**. We then stopped at the southern entrance to the park, at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint, where squadrons of vultures were arriving. We watched **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart** as well at this point.

A final stop was made to enjoy the view near the castle but with heavy rain threatened we soon headed back to Trujillo.

10th November 2018: The plains west of Trujillo, the River Almonte and Talaván Reservoir

Heavy rain during the night abated somewhat, but the day was mainly heavily overcast, and quite windy with long periods of light rain. We spent the day on the plains west of Trujillo and north of Cáceres. Highlights at the start were nice groups of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, a fine juvenile **Marsh Harrier** and a group of **Great Bustard** in flight. We also came across about 45 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, contentedly feeding in a field beside the track. We left the plains for a moment to descend to the River Almonte where we had good, albeit distant views of two **Black Wheatears**. From there we stopped beside the Talaván Reservoir where, sheltering from the rain, we had our picnic. We checked the reservoir, seeing some elegant **Great White Egrets** amongst other birds.

Returning to the plains we were delighted to find a large flock of **Little Bustard** (39 birds) and an even larger flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** (at least 120 birds) in the same field, as well as a party of **Golden Plover**. Before dropping in to see Neil Renwick for coffee, we watched a large flock of **Ravens** going to roost in a clump of eucalyptus trees whilst over twenty **Red Kites** were also assembling nearby.

11th November 2018: Sierra Brava reservoir, the rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta, Cubilar Reservoir

Much improved weather today, although it remained overcast pretty much the whole time. We stopped first of all at the Sierra Brava reservoir where we had magnificent views of an **Eagle Owl** and also of hundreds of waterfowl on the reservoir itself. We then checked a small pool near Madrigalejo, at the edge of the rice fields, where we heard a **Moustached Warbler** calling and giving subsong but failed to see it. However, we did see a **Penduline Tit** and some Red **Avadavats**. After coffee, we spent the rest of the morning driving across the rice fields, watching **Common Cranes**, but most spectacularly some large flocks of **Spanish Sparrows**. We had views of **Bluethroat**, **Common Waxbill**, **Reed Bunting** and **Zitting Cisticola**.

After a picnic lunch in a hide at Moheda Alta, where an **Iberian Great Shrike** was in close proximity, we looked at the area near the Cubilar Reservoir, enjoying more views of cranes, seeing a **Black Stork** and then memorably, an **Osprey** feeding at the Cubilar Reservoir.

We then returned across the rice fields to try again to see the Moustached Warbler, this time also unsuccessfully. On our return across the plains south of Zorita, we past a group of about a dozen **Great Bustard**.

12th November 2018: Arrocampo, Belén Plains and Trujillo

The day started with heavy rain which gradually became lighter during the morning. By the afternoon, although it was heavily overcast, it stayed dry.

We started at the Arrocampo Reservoir, sitting in Hide Two whilst it rained outside. Our focus was on small birds at the edge of the reedbed, and we managed views of **Bluethroat, Zitting Cisticola, Reed Bunting, Hoopoe** and numerous **Chiffchaffs. Marsh Harriers** quartered over the reeds, whilst **Water Rail** squealed and **Purple Swamphens** trumpeted. At the next hide, we obtained excellent views of the latter, as well as **Kingfisher** and **Little Grebe. Little Bitterns** although vocal remained hidden.

After coffee, we went on to the area to the west of Saucedilla, seeing birds like **Green Sandpiper, Iberian Grey Shrike** and duck including **Teal** and **Shoveler**. At our lunch stop, a **Woodlark** sang very briefly. As we left the area, we saw two **Black-winged Kites**, both though flying from their perches before we were close.

We then spent the remainder of the afternoon on the Belén Plains. This was very productive with large numbers of vultures, several **Iberian Grey Shrikes**, parties of **Rock Sparrow** and best of all an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** perched on a tree. We stopped briefly in the main square of Trujillo to watch about 20 **Crag Martin** and four **Red-rumped Swallow**.

13th November 2018: Madrigalejo, Guadalupe, Pico de Villuercas, River Almonte, Belén Plains

The day dawned clear and we enjoyed blue sky and sunshine throughout. We headed off at 08.30 south to Madrigalejo where we spent half an hour beside the old gravel workings, managing to get short views of the **Moustached Warbler** and hearing again its call and subsong. **Red Avadavats** were also present. We then drove north to Guadalupe, passing maize stubble fields with thousands upon thousands of **Common Crane**.

At Guadalupe we took a walk beside a river where we had views of **Crested Tit, Firecrest, Great Spotted Woodpecker** and **Black Redstart** amongst other woodland species. After coffee in Guadalupe we headed to the summit of the Villuercas Mountains, passing through belts of pines, sweet chestnut and Pyrenean oak. The autumn colours were simply breathtaking.

At the summit, where we had our picnic, we had flight views of three **Alpine Accentors**, as well as **Dartford Warbler, Black Redstart** and **Blue Rock Thrush**.



We made our descent through extraordinarily beautiful mountain scenery, then to drive on the western flank of the mountains, stopping at the place where the River Almonte leaves the range and heads westwards. Here amongst the circling **Griffon Vultures** we saw a pair of **Golden Eagles**.

We returned to base via the Belén Palins, seeing a couple of groups of Great Bustard.

14th November 2018: Valdecañas Reservoir and return to Madrid

The day dawned fine and we had excellent weather in the morning, with just some cloud building up by midday. We bade our farewells at Casa Rural El Recuerdo and left at 09.15, making a stop at the Valdecañas Reservoir, lying just inside Extremadura. Here we saw a few parties of **Greylag Geese**, **Wigeon** and **Teal**. On what looked like a dead hare a **Marsh Harrier** and a **Red Kite** took it in turns to scavenge. In the distance we also spotted the dark flapping form of an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** flying low over the far shore of the lake.

It was time then to pack away the optics and set off for Madrid. We stopped for snacks about halfway through the journey. During the remainder of the trip we had two further

sightings of **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, as well as several **Red Kites** and some **White Storks**.

We reached the airport in excellent time for the check-in.

Checklist

1. **Greylag Goose**: Small parties at Valdecañas Reservoir.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín and Sierra Brava Reservoirs.
3. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín, Arrocampo and Valdecañas.
4. **Gadwall**: Seen on most large water bodies.
5. **Teal**: Seen on most days.
6. **Mallard**: Seen on most days.
7. **Pintail**: Seen at Alcollarín and Cubilar.
8. **Shoveler**: Seen on most days.
9. **Tufted Duck**: Seen at Orellana Reservoir and Alcollarín.
10. **Red-crested Pochard**: 15 at Orellana Reservoir on 7th November and three at Cubilar on 11th.
11. **Common Pochard**: Seen at Orellana Reservoir and Alcollarín.
12. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen in dehesa on 13th November.
13. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Orellana, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
14. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen on most days.
15. **Black-necked Grebe**: One seen at Orellana Reservoir on 7th November.
16. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost daily.
17. **Little Bittern**: Heard at Arrocampo.
18. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on several days.
19. **Little Egret**: Seen on several days.
20. **Great Egret**: Seen on several days.
21. **Great Heron**: Seen almost daily.
22. **Black Stork**: Nine at Orellana reservoir on 7th November, one at Alcollarín on 8th, two at Monfragüe on 9th and one near Cubilar on 11th.
23. **White Stork**: Seen on rice fields.
24. **Glossy Ibis**: Five seen on rice fields on 7th November.
25. **Spoonbill**: Two at Alcollarín on 8th.
26. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen daily.
27. **Black Vulture**: Seen on most days.
28. **Egyptian Vulture**: One at hide near Torrejón el Rubio on 9th November.
29. **Osprey**: One at Cubilar on 11th November.
30. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Seen in Monfragüe, Belém Plains, Valdecañas Reservoir and on return to Madrid.
31. **Golden Eagle**: Two in Villuercas Mountains on 13th November.
32. **Bonelli's Eagle**: Two at Orellana Reservoir on 7th November.
33. **Red Kite**: Seen every day.

34. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
35. **Hen Harrier:** Two seen on rice fields on 7th November.
36. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost every day.
37. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on three days.
38. **Black-winged Kite:** Two seen at Arrocampo.
39. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
40. **Lesser Kestrel:** Two males and a female at Campo Lugar on 8th November.
41. **Peregrine Falcon:** Seen at Monfragüe.
42. **Merlin:** Seen on plains on 10th November.
43. **Water Rail:** Heard at Madrigalejo and Arrocampo.
44. **Moorhen:** Seen at Madrigalejo and Arrocampo.
45. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
46. **Common Coot:** Seen on all large water bodies.
47. **Common Crane:** Seen daily.
48. **Little Bustard:** 6 at Campo Lugar on 8th November and 39 north of Trujillo on 10th November.
49. **Great Bustard:** 18 at Campo Lugar on 8th November and a party west of Cáceres on 10th November. 12 near Zorita on 11th November and two groups on Belén Plains on 13th November.
50. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on rice fields and Alcollarín.
51. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields on 7th November.
52. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on several days.
53. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on rice fields on 7th November.
54. **Golden Plover:** Small numbers seen on the plains.
55. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen almost every day in large numbers.
56. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields on 7th November.
57. **Little Stint:** Seen on rice fields on 7th November.
58. **Grey Phalarope:** An adult at Alcollarín on 8th November.
59. **Common Snipe:** Seen almost every day.
60. **Greenshank:** Seen on rice fields on 7th November.
61. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen almost every day.
62. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen on rice fields, Orellana and Alcollarín Reservoirs.
63. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen daily.
64. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on several days.
65. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on 8th and 10th November.
66. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Two large flocks seen on 10th November, the latter over 120 birds.
67. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
68. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen most days.
69. **Stock Dove:** 15 on plains north of Cáceres on 10th November.
70. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
71. **Eagle Owl:** One at Sierra Brava on 11th November.
72. **Little Owl:** Seen on several days.

73. **Kingfisher**: Seen on most days.
74. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
75. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen on two days.
76. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on the plains.
77. **Crested Lark**: Seen daily.
78. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on most days.
79. **Woodlark**: Seen near Arrocampo.
80. **Skylark**: Seen on most days.
81. **Crag Martin**: Seen daily.
82. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Four seen in Trujillo on 12th November.
83. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen daily.
84. **Water Pipit**: Seen on rice fields on 7th November.
85. **Grey wagtail**: Seen most days.
86. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
87. **Wren**: Recorded on two days.
88. **Alpine Accentor**: About four present at Villuercas peak on 13th November.
89. **Robin**: Seen daily.
90. **Bluethroat**: Seen on rice fields on 11th November and at Arrocampo on 12th.
91. **Black Redstart**: Seen daily.
92. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
93. **Northern Wheatear**: One at Campo Lugar on 8th November.
94. **Black Wheatear**: Two at River Almonte on 10th November.
95. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
96. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
97. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on several days.
98. **Song Thrush**: Seen daily.
99. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen most days.
100. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on several days.
101. **Moustached Warbler**: Seen on 13th November at Madrigalejo and heard also on 11th.
102. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen in the Villuercas Mountains and Belén Plains on 13th November.
103. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
104. **Blackcap**: Seen daily.
105. **Chiffchaff**: Seen daily.
106. **Firecrest**: Seen at Guadalupe on 13th November.
107. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on three days.
108. **Crested Tit**: Seen near Guadalupe on 13th November.
109. **Blue Tit**: Seen on several days.
110. **Great Tit**: Seen on several days.
111. **Nuthatch**: Recorded on two days.
112. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Recorded on two days.
113. **Penduline Tit**: Seen at Madrigalejo and Arrocampo.

114. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
115. **Jay:** Seen on three days.
116. **Azure-winged (Iberian) Magpie:** Seen daily.
117. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
118. **Jackdaw:** Seen on several days.
119. **Raven:** Seen daily.
120. **Spotless Startling:** Seen daily.
121. **Common Starling:** Seen on plains.
122. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
123. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen daily.
124. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
125. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on Belén Plains on 12th November.
126. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on several days.
127. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
128. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
129. **Serin:** Seen on three days.
130. **Greenfinch:** Seen at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
131. **Goldfinch:** Seen every day.
132. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
133. **Common Crossbill:** 12 in Monfragüe on 9th November.
134. **Hawfinch:** Seen on two days.
135. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
136. **Reed Bunting:** Seen in rice fields and Arrocampo.
137. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.