

Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo
LATE WINTER HOLIDAY REPORT FOR IGORIS
(7th February - 15th February 2018)

Itinerary

7th February 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

8th February 2018: Plains near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca

9th February 2018: The Campo Lugar plains and Alcollarín Reservoir

10th February 2018: The Villuercas Mountains

11th February 2018: La Cañada Hide, Torrejón El Rubio

13th February 2018: Monfragüe National Park

14th February 2018: The rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and the Sierra Brava and Orellana Reservoirs.

15th February 2018; Trujillo and Arrocampo Reservoir, return to Madrid



TRIP REPORT

7th February 2018: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Igoris arrived on time just before 4pm on the flight from Vilnius, but it took some time before the bags arrived on the luggage belt. We left Madrid airport, headed around the ring road to leave Madrid on the motorway for Extremadura. Just beyond the edge of the city, we stopped for coffee and then did the remaining run non-stop to base, arriving at about 19.30.

8th February 2018: Plains near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca

It was a cold, frosty start to the day and throughout the day, despite the clear blue skies, the fresh wind meant that it always felt chilly. We stopped first on the open plains to the west of Trujillo. Here we watched several hundred **Spanish Sparrows** feeding beside a cattle feed area, sometimes rising *en mass* to land on the top of a holm oak nearby. Nearby, on a large open field, we found a party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. We drove along a dirt road not far from there, seeing some **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, a couple of groups of **Great Bustards** and familiarised ourselves with the range of small birds present such as **Calandra**, **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**, **Corn Buntings** and **Stonechats**. A flock of wintering **Stock Dove** were of interest too.

We then visited the plains south of Santa Marta de Magasca, seeing some more **Great Bustard** and a party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. A **Merlin** was seen chasing a small bird in flight and we had nice views of **Little Owl** and **Common Kestrel**.

We paused to admire the view across the valley of the River Tamuja and then had coffee in the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. In the bar a group of four cheerful old men were playing cards at one of the tables.

Our picnic took place beside the River Magasca, with **Griffon Vultures** passing overhead and a pair of **Crag Martins** hawking insects.

On the plains again for the afternoon, north of the village, where we watched hunting **Hen Harriers**, and found a group of **Little Bustard** and a large flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. A second **Merlin** was seen.

The afternoon ended as we had started, watching huge flocks of **Spanish Sparrows**, with the spectacular sight of the snow-clad Gredos Mountains to the north.

9th February 2018: The Campo Lugar plains and Alcollarín Reservoir

Another cold start to the day and it remained quite cold all day with increasingly overcast skies. We started on the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. At our first stop we listened to the melancholic calls of **Golden Plover**, which with **Lapwing** were foraging in the pasture. Just as two **Black Vultures** flew over, a group of 20 **Little Bustard** rose from the ground and we watched them circling round in flight. We saw a

group of **Great Bustards** stride majestically amongst sheep, a wonderful juxtaposition, but later we enjoyed much closer views of these magnificent birds.

At two pools we saw a selection of duck, waders like **Black-winged Stilt** and **Spoonbill**. A pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoos** gave us prolonged views. But pride of place must go to the **Golden Eagle** which we watched perched in a tree. It only flew when we flushed an **Iberian Hare** from close to the track. The eagle saw the hare and took off, getting quite close to us before descending behind a hill with a swerve in its flight as if it was about to attack. We will never know whether it successfully caught the hare or not.

Beside the village of Campo Lugar a very obliging **Iberian Grey Shrike** posed for the camera, and then we stopped for coffee at another friendly bar.

The rest of the day was spent at the Alcollarín Reservoir. We had a picnic beside a small pool and a walk lunch gave us good views of several duck species, but best of all a wonderful **Jack Snipe** which we watched at length.

During the afternoon we saw a good range of duck species, as well as a few waders, whilst the rather bitter wind was forcing the **Crag Martins** and **Barn Swallows** to hunt for insects low over the water.



10th February 2018: The Villuercas Mountains

We set off in cold and foggy conditions from Casa Rural El Recuerdo, but once we approached the hill town of Cañamero, we had risen above the mist and for the rest of the day enjoyed beautiful sunshine. We took a road which reached the summit of the Pico de Villuercas, at 1600 metres above sea-level. From here we had a magnificent view across Extremadura and beyond: the snow-capped Gredos Mountains and the successive ridges of the Villuercas Mountains Geoparque. There were indeed patches of snow where we stood, and a wonderful silence. Although there were not many birds in view we found a flock of about 15 **Alpine Accentors** and watched **Griffon Vultures** wheeling high in the blue sky, above the folds of fog below.



We descended and stopped to see a medieval snow well and had our picnic close by. We then dropped down through belts of deciduous oak, sweet chestnut and pine, to the historic town of Guadalupe, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We visited the basilica, strolled around the town and enjoyed a coffee in the Main Square.

We then visited the western flank of the Villuercas Mountains, stopping for a lovely walk at the small village of Cabañas del Castillo, where we saw a newly returned **Egyptian**

Vulture. The geology of the rock and the colours of the lichens on them were extraordinary.

We finished the day with a stop at the River Almonte, cutting a gorge through the quartzite rocks, here **Griffon Vultures** circled. We then drove across the vast *dehesas*, reaching the town of Madroñera where children were celebrating the Carnival.

11th February 2018: La Cañada Hide, Torrejón El Rubio

We set off early in order to arrive in Torrejón El Rubio just after sunrise. Pilar took us to the hide just south of the Monfragüe National Park where meat remains had been put out. We settled ourselves in and prepared to wait for the hoped-for arrive of the vultures. There was plenty to keep us occupied in the meantime with photogenic **Iberian Magpies**, swooping **Red Kites**, boisterous **Ravens** and a **White Stork** that fastidiously cleaned each morsel of food in a water trough before eating it.

However, despite there being a few **Griffon Vultures** in the vicinity, none come close to the food itself. This was very unusual, but we waited until about 16.00, by which time it was clear that vultures were starting to move back to the colonies on the cliffs at Monfragüe, which we could see from where we were sitting.

Igoris returned to Torrejón that night to have a second attempt the following day, when, after another long wait, his patience was rewarded with both **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** coming down to feed.

13th February 2018: Monfragüe National Park

It was a fine sunny morning and we drove again through Torrejón El Rubio, but this time to proceed to the Monfragüe National Park. Our first stop was the viewpoint opposite the huge and impressive Peña Falcón rock face. Here, appropriately enough, there was a pair of **Peregrines**, but also large numbers of **Griffon Vultures** wheeling over the rock and even more standing perched on the rock face.

We then continued through the park, stopping to photograph some **Red Deer**, to the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. Here again we enjoyed excellent views of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**. The mass of Cormorants fishing on the river was very entertaining, as was a wonderful **Otter** which we watched at length. But even the Otter came into second place where the hoped-for appearance of **Spanish Imperial Eagle** materialised. We had several sightings of this magnificent eagle, including watching it perched and preening on the top of the rock face in front.



After coffee at the edge of a cork oak grove, we retraced our route through the park. It was starting to get overcast, so there were fewer birds of prey on the air. We had our picnic in a belt of pines, where again we had good views of **Red Deer** as well as some **Hawfinches**. We stopped to look at the medieval Cardinal's Bridge and made a second visit at the Peña Falcon viewpoint. This time, vultures were coming into roost and we had superb views of the birds flying in to land.

14th February 2018: The rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and the Sierra Brava and Orellana Reservoirs.

Today we headed south, past the town of Zorita and onwards towards Madrigalejo. We paused by the great dam of the Sierra Brava reservoir. Here we found a fine **Eagle Owl** roosting and also saw a variety of duck on the water, including **Pintail** recently arrived from West Africa. **House Martins** were present at the dam, another sign that spring was on its way. A huge quantity of water was entering the reservoir from a canal – part of the infrastructure linking the differing reservoirs that ring the upper flood plain of the Guadiana River where the main rice production of Extremadura is.

We descended to the rice fields, dry at this time of the year, but we did find a few with some water which attracted waders such as **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Dunlin** and **Kentish Plovers**. Sometimes **Marsh Harriers** would be wheeling low over the fields, putting up **Meadow** and **Water Pipits**. Parties of **Common Cranes** were feeding, and we had closer views of them close to the town of Madrigalejo.

We had coffee in a traditional little bar at Obando, where we saw the little table warmers being set up.

We paid a visit to the Crane Information Centre at Moheda Alta and then had a picnic lunch at the edge of the *dehesa* woodland, with the sound of cranes around us. After lunch we visited a small pool and sat in an observation hide at the edge of a strip of rice fields. Parties of **Pintail** were present, and we also saw a **Bluethroat** and both **Common Waxbill** and **Red Avadavat**.

We then visited two sites beside the Orellana Reservoir, seeing a group of **Red-crested Pochard**, as well as good numbers of **Black-headed Gulls** and other ducks such as **Common Pochard** and **Tufted Duck**.

15th February 2018; Trujillo and Arrocampo Reservoir, return to Madrid

We set off at 09.00 from Casa Rural El Recuerdo and stopped first in Trujillo to visit the historic centre of this beautiful small town. It was good for birds as well, with **White Storks** nesting on many of the high buildings. We then drove to Torrejón el Rubio to collect a camera screw that had been left in the hide and from there we took a road across an area of beautiful *dehesa* to join the motorway for Madrid. We had a brief stop late morning at the Arrocampo Reservoir. Here we had views of **Purple Swamphen** and nearby, a **Black-winged Kite**. Some waders such as **Black-tailed Godwit** and **Black-winged Stilt** were also seen. As we had our picnic lunch, **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** flew low overhead, as if to bid us farewell.

We made a brief visit to the Orchydarium Information Centre at the edge of Almaráz and then set off for Madrid. A stop at the Amal Cafeteria enabled Igoris to buy a nice selection of fine gastronomic products from the region. We arrived at the hotel close to the airport just before our estimated arrival time.

List of Birds Seen

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir
3. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir
4. **Wigeon**: Seen at several reservoirs.
5. **Gadwall**: Seen at several reservoirs.
6. **Teal**: Seen at several reservoirs.
7. **Pintail**: Seen at several reservoirs.

8. **Mallard**: Seen at several reservoirs.
9. **Shoveler**: Seen at several reservoirs.
10. **Red-crested Pochard**: Seen at Orellana Reservoir.
11. **Common Pochard**: Seen at several reservoirs
12. **Tufted Duck**: Seen at several reservoirs
13. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on the plains
14. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín
15. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at several reservoirs
16. **Black-necked Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín
17. **Great Cormorant**: Seen at several reservoirs
18. **Cattle Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo and rice fields.
19. **Little Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo, Alcollarín and rice fields.
20. **Grey Heron**: Seen every day.
21. **White Stork**: Seen every day.
22. **Spoonbill**: Seen on pool at Campo Lugar plains.
23. **Greater Flamingo**: Seen at Alcollarín
24. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
25. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen every day.
26. **Black Vulture**: Seen every day.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Seen in Monfragüe
28. **Golden Eagle**: Seen on pool at Campo Lugar plains.
29. **Bonelli's Eagle**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
30. **Red Kite**: Seen every day.
31. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen most days.
32. **Hen Harrier**: Seen most days.
33. **Common Buzzard**: Seen every day.
34. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
35. **Black-winged Kite**: Seen at Arrocampo.
36. **Common Kestrel**: Seen every day.
37. **Merlin**: Seen on plains.
38. **Peregrine Falcon**: Seen at Monfragüe.
39. **Moorhen**: Seen at Arrocampo.
40. **Purple Swamphen**: Seen at Arrocampo.
41. **Common Coot**: Seen at several reservoirs.
42. **Common Crane**: Seen every day.
43. **Little Bustard**: Seen on the plains
44. **Great Bustard**: Seen on the plains
45. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen at Arrocampo, Alcollarín and rice fields.
46. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen on rice fields.
47. **Ringed Plover**: Seen on rice fields.
48. **Kentish Plover**: Seen on rice fields.
49. **Golden Plover**: Seen on the plains
50. **Lapwing**: Seen on the plains

51. **Dunlin**: Seen on rice fields.
52. **Common Snipe**: Seen on rice fields.
53. **Jack Snipe**: Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir
54. **Black-tailed Godwit**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
55. **Green Sandpiper**: Seen most days.
56. **Common Sandpiper**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
57. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen most days.
58. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen every day.
59. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen on the plains
60. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Seen on the plains
61. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon**: Seen every day.
62. **Stock Dove**: Seen on plains.
63. **Wood Pigeon**: Seen every day.
64. **Collared Dove**: Seen every day.
65. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: Seen at Campo Lugar.
66. **Eagle Owl**: Seen at Sierra Brava
67. **Little Owl**: Seen on plains
68. **Hoopoe**: Seen most days.
69. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen in Monfragüe.
70. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains
71. **Crested Lark**: Seen on plains
72. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on plains
73. **Woodlark**: Seen at Arrocampo.
74. **Skylark**: Seen on plains
75. **Crag Martin**: Seen most days.
76. **Barn Swallow**: Seen at Alcollarín
77. **House Martin**: seen at Sierra Brava.
78. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen most days.
79. **Water Pipit**: Seen on rice fields.
80. **White Wagtail**: Seen every day.
81. **Wren**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
82. **Alpine Accentor**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
83. **Robin**: Seen most days.
84. **Bluethroat**: Seen on rice fields.
85. **Black Redstart**: Seen on several days.
86. **Stonechat**: Seen most days.
87. **Blackbird**: Seen most days.
88. **Song Thrush**: Seen most days.
89. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen in *dehesa*.
90. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen at Arrocampo.
91. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen on plains.
92. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen on plains.
93. **Blackcap**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.

94. **Common Chiffchaff**: Seen every day.
95. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen in Monfragüe.
96. **Blue Tit**: Seen in Monfragüe.
97. **Great Tit**: Seen in Monfragüe.
98. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen most days.
99. **Jay**: Seen in Monfragüe.
100. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen most days.
101. **Magpie**: Seen most days.
102. **Raven**: Seen most days.
103. **Jackdaw**: Seen most days.
104. **Common Starling**: Seen on plains.
105. **Spotless Starling**: Seen every day.
106. **House Sparrow**: Seen every day.
107. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen most days.
108. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields.
109. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on rice fields.
110. **Common Waxbill**: Seen on rice fields.
111. **Chaffinch**: Seen every day.
112. **Greenfinch**: Seen most days.
113. **Goldfinch**: Seen most days.
114. **Linnet**: Seen most days.
115. **Hawfinch**: Seen in Monfragüe.
116. **Rock Bunting**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
117. **Cirl Bunting**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
118. **Corn Bunting**: Seen most days.