

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR CLAIRE AND JAMES
Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

18th – 23rd January 2019

Itinerary

18th January 2019: Transfer to Lisbon to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

19th January 2019: Sierra Brava Reservoir and the rice fields near Madrigalejo

20th January 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and San Lazaro park in Trujillo.

21st January 2019: Arrocampo Reservoir and Monfragüe National Park

22nd January 2019: The Villuercas Mountains

23rd January 2019: Campo Lugar and return to Lisbon



TRIP REPORT

18th January 2019: Transfer to Lisbon to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Claire and James arrived slightly ahead of schedule at Lisbon airport and were met by Martin and Claudia. We fairly easily made our way out of Lisbon, crossing the Tagus River on the amazing Vasco de Gama bridge and then heading south of Lisbon before veering eastwards towards Spain.

We saw several **Red Kites**, a **Black-winged Kite** hovering close to the motorway and numerous **White Storks** on nests. We had a short coffee stop about 100 km short of the Spanish border and then lunch at a service station inside Extremadura, accompanied by almost 20 Peacocks!

In Extremadura we drove through a large cultivated area where **Common Cranes** were feeding in maize stubble fields.

We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 16.30, in time for Claire and James to settle in and take a late afternoon walk before dinner.

19th January 2019: Sierra Brava Reservoir and the rice fields near Madrigalejo

The weather had closed in during the night and we awoke to mist and light rain. It remained heavily overcast all day with periods of rain, thankfully never too heavy.



We headed south, through the town of Zorita and onwards towards Madrigalejo. We made a short stop at the Sierra Brava reservoir dam. There were a couple of hundred **Great Crested Grebe** close to the dam, and rafts of duck further towards the middle of the water body, mainly **Mallard** and **Shoveler**, with a few **Pintail**, **Teal** and **Common Shelduck**.

We spent an hour or so exploring the rice stubble fields near the village of Vegas Altas, where we had our first good views of **Common Cranes**. A fine male **Hen Harrier** flew low over the stubble. There were large flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** and **Common Waxbill**. We also saw three **Egyptian Mongoose**. After coffee in the village we headed in the direction of Obando, seeing more **Common Cranes** in small groups and generally very approachable. However, nothing quite prepared us for the spectacle of a couple of thousand in a stubble field beside the road. The field looked grey from a distance! At Moheda Alta we paid a brief visit to the Crane Information Centre and then had lunch in the hide (to shelter from the rain) overlooking a strip of rice fields. Here we had superb views of three **Black Storks**.



The afternoon was spent on the rice fields near the village of Palazuelo. Here we saw more **Common Cranes**, a handsome **Hen Harrier** and several **Marsh Harriers**, a group of six **Avocet** and four **Spoonbill**, but perhaps most memorable was the sight of a field being ploughed with hundreds of gulls and egrets following the tractor through the black oozy mud.



We had a delay getting back home, thanks to a puncture, so we reached base shortly after 18.00 with more rain setting in.

20th January 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and San Lazaro park in Trujillo.

Just before dawn the clouds that brought heavy rain during the night moved on and we enjoyed clear blue skies all day. There was however a very fresh northerly wind. The light was crisp all day and we saw for the first time the snow-clad slopes of the Gredos Mountains.

We started on the plains west of Trujillo, seeing at our first stop a group of **Little Bustard**, barely visible in the cover of banks of dead thistles. A huge flock of **Spanish Sparrows** and **Calandra Larks** fed close to livestock pens, whilst we also saw the first

Hoopoes of the day. Nearby we had superb views of a flock of 18 **Great Bustard** in glorious sunshine and a large party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** feeding on the ground not far from them. We followed this by a walk along a dirt track, having excellent views of **Thekla** and **Crested Larks**, a male **Hen Harrier** and several **Red Kites**.



Following coffee in a small village bar in Santa Marta de Magasca, full of men playing cards, we stopped to survey the view over the River Tamuja. As we stood, we watched groups of **Grieffon Vultures** rising in thermals, some **Black Vultures** and then a pair of **Bonelli's Eagle**. They were very distant most of the time, but they approached reasonably close for us to enjoy watching them with our binoculars.

North of the village, beside the River Magasca, we had our picnic. There was a procession of **Grieffon Vultures** overhead and a **Golden Eagle** made a close but all too brief crossing of the valley.

We rose again to the plains, stopping to see a small group of **Little Bustard**, and then enjoying a long walk along a drovers' trail. We had a close fly-over of a group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** and there were parties of **Golden Plover** and **Lapwing**. A large flock of **Linnet** rose and settled again in a meadow and all around us were **Meadow Pipits**, **Skylarks** and **Spotless Starlings**, no doubt attracting the female **Hen Harrier**

which passed close by. But most exciting was an excellent view of a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**. They descended to the ground, landing out of view, but then rose to settle in a tree where we could see them eating a prey item.

We then headed towards Trujillo, stopping to watch an immature **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, a female **Sparrowhawk**, a **Black Vulture** on the ground and flocks of **Ravens** heading for roost. As at the start of the day, big flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** were also encountered. We dropped into the San Lazaro Park in Trujillo where we had wonderfully close views of a pair of **Black-winged Stilts** and **Little Ringed Plovers**.



21st January 2019: Arrocampo Reservoir and Monfragüe National Park

A frosty start to the day and before breakfast James spent some time photographing the **Iberian Magpies** in the garden, whilst Claire went for a walk and saw a party of **Hawfinches**. After breakfast we headed north-east in beautiful sunshine to the reservoir of Arrocampo near the village of Saucedilla. The conditions were perfect with no wind and a wonderful backdrop of the Gredos Mountains, with fresh snow on their higher slopes.

At Arrocampo we quickly got fine views of a **Purple Swamphen**. We walked beside the marsh for over an hour, seeing numerous **Common Chiffchaffs** and eventually getting

good views of a couple of **Bluethroats**. There were flocks of small finches, like **Linnets** and **Goldfinch**. We also watched a **Penduline Tit** feeding on a seed-head of lesser reed mace. Above us, **Black Vultures** passed. After coffee, we left the village and saw a **Black-winged Kite** being mobbed by a **Common Kestrel**.

We headed to Monfragüe National Park, making our first stop at the Portilla del Tiétar, where we had our picnic. The water of the River Tiétar was beautifully calm, so the reflections of the cliff opposite were superb. We watched first an immature **Golden Eagle** soaring with **Griffon Vultures**, and then later two adults sky-dancing. An **Otter** also showed itself, causing interest from a **Grey Heron**.

We then made a stop in an area of pines, and, unusual for the location, a party of **Common Crossbill** flew over. We had glimpses of **Crested Tit** and **Hawfinch**, as well as a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**.

We then made a final stop at the vast Peña Falcon rockface where we again enjoyed the arrival of **Griffon Vultures**, as well as sighting of birds like **Blue Rock Thrush** and several **Black Redstarts**.



22nd January 2019: The Villuercas Mountains

It was a cloudier day with a fresh northerly wind. We spent the day exploring the Villuercas Mountains to the east, a UNESCO Geological Park, famed for its spectacular scenery.

We started the day with a walk beside the Guadalupe stream, near the monastery town bearing the same name. It was quiet bird wise, but very pretty with an old water mill and bare winter trees. Following a coffee stop, we rose above the town and through belts of pines, sweet chestnut and Pyrenean oak towards the Villuercas peak. We made a stop to inspect the medieval ice house, hearing a **Dunnock** in the scrub nearby. Cloud hugged the peak itself, at 5000 feet above sea-level. Here the conditions were very different, with freezing fog lacing the vegetation with ice. It was too cold and windy, and visibility was too poor to admire the scenery, so we made a descent towards the village of Navazuelas. On the way we saw an **Alpine Accentor** and two **Dunnocks** on the track.



We had our picnic in the relative shelter of the River Almonte gorge, with vultures soaring overhead and the bushes full of **Blackcaps**. We then visited the tiny village of Cabañas del Castillo, which offered spectacular views across the almost African *dehesa* landscape to the west and onto the sheer ridges of the Villuercas Mountains. There were **Black Redstart** and **Rock Buntings** in the village. We continued on the road south, stopping to walk beside a grove of cork oak, with **Nuthatches** calling, **Short-toed Treecreepers** and again **Griphon Vultures** above. We then walked in pinewoods above the village of Cañamero, where we had excellent views of **Crested Tit**. Finally, closer to the village we walked near the Ruercas river, getting glimpses of a **Firecrest** and watching **Crag Martins** and **House Martins** coming to roost.

23rd January 2019: Campo Lugar and return to Lisbon

A cloudy and windy day, but rather milder and we set off before 09.30, but stopped three times on our way through the village for obliging **Hawfinches**.

We then headed south to the edge of the village of Campo Lugar where we found a winter roost of 30 **Stone Curlews**, sitting rather morose looking, heads into the wind. Nearby we entered a quarry, watching flocks of **Jackdaws** depart and then hearing rather quiet deep hoots. A **fox** was disturbed and it sped up a little track to the top of the quarry where it was mobbed by an **Eagle Owl**. We then had a magnificent opportunity of watching this beautiful bird as it looked at us!

We then cut across country to join the A5 motorway, seeing numerous **Common Cranes**, **White Storks** and **Red Kites**, stopping near Badajoz for coffee (and Peacock watching). We then entered Portugal and reached Lisbon airport as scheduled at 13.00 (Portuguese time).

Annotated Species List

Birds

1. **Greylag Goose**: Seen at Sierra Brava.
2. **Common Shelduck**: Group of eight at Sierra Brava.
3. **Teal**: Seen at Sierra Brava.
4. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
5. **Pintail**: Seen at Sierra Brava Reservoir.
6. **Shoveler**: Seen on several water bodies.
7. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on the plains.
8. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Arrocampo and in Trujillo.
9. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Sierra Brava.
10. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost daily with large numbers at Monfragüe.
11. **Cattle Egret**: Seen in large numbers on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
12. **Little Egret**: Small numbers on the rice fields and also River Tamuja.

13. **Great Egret**: Seen on the rice fields.
14. **Grey Heron**: Seen every day.
15. **White Stork**: Seen en route from Lisbon and almost every day.
16. **Black Stork**: Three seen at Moheda Alta.
17. **Spoonbill**: Four seen on rice fields.
18. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
19. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost daily.
20. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: A pair and an immature on the plains near Trujillo.
21. **Golden Eagle**: One seen at River Magasca and three seen in Monfragüe.
22. **Bonelli's Eagle**: A pair seen at River Tamuja.
23. **Red Kite**: Seen almost daily.
24. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost every day.
25. **Hen Harrier**: Seen on plains and rice fields.
26. **Common Buzzard**: Seen daily.
27. **Sparrowhawk**: One seen on plains near Trujillo.
28. **Black-winged Kite**: One seen on journey from Lisbon and one at Arrocampo.
29. **Common Kestrel**: Seen almost daily.
30. **Peregrine**: Seen non rice fields, in Monfragüe and in Villuercas Mountains.
31. **Moorhen**: Recorded in rice fields and at Arrocampo.
32. **Purple Swamphen**: Four or five seen at Arrocampo.
33. **Common Coot**: Present at Sierra Brava and Arrocampo reservoirs.
34. **Water Rail**: Heard at Arrocampo.
35. **Common Crane**: Seen almost daily and several thousand present on rice fields.
36. **Little Bustard**: Seen on plains near Trujillo.
37. **Great Bustard**: 18 on plains near Trujillo.
38. **Black-winged Stilt**: Two at San Lazaro Park, Trujillo.
39. **Avocet**: Six on rice fields.
40. **Stone Curlew**: 30 near village of Campo Lugar.
41. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen at San Lazaro Park, Trujillo.
42. **Kentish Plover**: One on rice fields.
43. **Golden Plover**: Seen on plains.
44. **Northern Lapwing**: Seen daily.
45. **Common Snipe**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
46. **Common Curlew**: Seen on rice fields.
47. **Common Redshank**: A small flock seen on rice fields.
48. **Greenshank**: Over 20 seen on rice fields.
49. **Green Sandpiper**: Singles seen most days.
50. **Common Sandpiper**: One at Sierra Brava reservoir.
51. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen daily.
52. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen on rice fields.
53. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains north-west of Trujillo.
54. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon**: Recorded daily.
55. **Stock Dove**: A small party on the plains near Trujillo.
56. **Wood Pigeon**: Seen almost daily.
57. **Collared Dove**: Seen daily.
58. **Eagle Owl**: Spectacular view near Campo Lugar.
59. **Kingfisher**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
60. **Hoopoe**: Seen almost daily.
61. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas Mountains.
62. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains.
63. **Skylark**: Seen on plains.

64. **Crested Lark**: Seen almost daily.
65. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on plains.
66. **Crag Martin**: Seen on several days.
67. **House Martin**: Seen at Monfragüe and near Cañamero.
68. **Water Pipit**: Seen on rice fields.
69. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen daily.
70. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen most days.
71. **White Wagtail**: Seen every day.
72. **Wren**: Recorded at Monfragüe and Villuercas.
73. **Dunnock**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
74. **Alpine Accentor**: One seen in Villuercas Mountains.
75. **Robin**: Seen almost daily.
76. **Bluethroat**: Good views at Arrocampo.
77. **Black Redstart**: Seen daily.
78. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
79. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Monfragüe.
80. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
81. **Song Thrush**: Seen on several days.
82. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
83. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
84. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
85. **Sardinian Warbler**: Recorded daily.
86. **Blackcap**: Seen or heard daily.
87. **Chiffchaff**: Seen or heard daily.
88. **Firecrest**: One briefly near Cañamero.
89. **Crested Tit**: Seen at Monfragüe and near Cañamero.
90. **Blue Tit**: Seen almost daily.
91. **Great Tit**: Seen almost daily.
92. **Nuthatch**: Recorded near Cañamero.
93. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Recorded near Cañamero.
94. **Penduline Tit**: One at Arrocampo.
95. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: seen almost daily.
96. **Jay**: Seen in Monfragüe and Villuercas.
97. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
98. **Magpie**: Seen daily.
99. **Jackdaw**: Seen almost daily.
100. **Raven**: Seen daily.
101. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
102. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
103. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen daily.
104. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields.
105. **Rock Sparrow**: Seen on plains.
106. **Common Waxbill**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
107. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on rice fields.
108. **Chaffinch**: Seen daily.
109. **Serin**: Seen on several days.
110. **Greenfinch**: seen most days.
111. **Goldfinch**: Seen daily.
112. **Linnet**: Seen on several days
113. **Common Crossbill**: Ten seen in Monfragüe.
114. **Hawfinch**: Seen at Monfragüe and Pago de San Clemente.

115. **Rock Bunting**: Two seen in Cabañas del Castillo.
116. **Reed Bunting**: Seen at Arrocampo.

Mammals

Red Fox

Otter

Egyptian Mongoose

Red Deer