

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR TONY AND TRIS

25th January – 1st February 2019

Birding Extremadura & Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Itinerary

25th January 2019: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

26th January 2019: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Orellana reservoir

27th January 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Belén and Trujillo

28th January 2019: Monfragüe National Park

29th January 2019: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Santa Amalia and the Campo Lugar plains.

30th January 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Campo Lugar.

31st January 2019: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Alcollarín Reservoir

1st February 2019: Transfer to Madrid airport.

Trip Report

25th January 2019: Transfer from Madrid airport to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

Tony and Tris arrived ahead of schedule and got through the airport in record time, so amazingly we were already heading off just 15th minutes after the scheduled arrival time of the flight! We had an easy run from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, stopping a couple of times for refreshments.

26th January 2019: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Orellana reservoir

A calm and sunny day, almost spring like and an excellent way to start the week of January bird photography. We spent almost the whole day on the rice fields and maize stubble near Madrigalejo. Our target was **Common Crane** and we saw thousands! Despite their abundance they were not the easiest subjects to photograph. Generally, we found the most approachable were those in family groups. Most of the birds we saw were feeding on the crop stubble, but we did find a few in the *dehesa* woodland.

Other birds seen included **Merlin**, **Spoonbill**, **Great Bustard**, **Wood Sandpiper**, large groups of **Glossy Ibis** and **White Storks**, and large flocks of **Spanish Sparrows**. We had coffee at a small bar in the village of Vegas Altas and our picnic in the *dehesa*

beside Moheda Alta. Despite being a Saturday and with glorious weather, we were the only people in the picnic site.

We paid a visit to a small bay of the Orellana Reservoir, nears the village of Casas de Don Pedro, where we saw an overwintering **Whiskered Tern** and small numbers of duck (**Mallard**, **Tufted Duck**, **Shoveler** and **Pochard**). Returning to the rice and maize fields at the end of the afternoon we took in the breathtaking spectacle of several thousand **cranes** coming together for a pre-roost gathering. In the evening light and the rosy-tinged Villuercas Mountains beyond, it was a remarkable sight.

27th January 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Belén and Trujillo

Another sunny day, but this time we had to cope with a fresh north-westerly wind, which made it quite difficult for finding small birds. We started on the plains west of Trujillo, where we had our first good views of **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**, as well as an obliging **Calandra Lark**, a large flock of **White Wagtails** including one **Pied Wagtail** and a distant **Great Bustard**. We then checked the areas south of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, but this was less productive. After coffee in the village we joined the Trujillo-Monroy road, where we had good views of a flock of 24 **Little Bustard**. Following lunch beside the River Magasca, we returned to the Monroy road, heading east, past the village of Aldea del Obispo and through an area of *dehesa* where we found a few family groups of **Common Crane**.

We did a circuit back to Trujillo across the Belén Plains, seeing a male **Hen Harrier**, stopping at the San Lazaro park in Trujillo to see **Black-winged Stilt** and **Little Ringed Plovers**. From there we returned to the Monroy Road. We had nice views again of **Little Bustard** and a single **Great Bustard**. We ended the afternoon where we started the day, on the plans west of Trujillo. Here we had good view of another **Great Bustard** and huge flocks of **Spanish Sparrows**.

28th January 2019: Monfragüe National Park

A fresh north-westerly wind was the feature today, which brought increasingly heavy cloud cover during the afternoon.

We headed north to spend the day in the Monfragüe National Park. We made our first stop at the Portilla del Tiétar, where the morning light on the rock face in front of us was gorgeous. Both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** were extremely active, with hardly a moment without birds soaring above or coming down to land on the cliff. We managed a couple of rather distant views of the **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, and rather prolonged views (albeit also distant) of a pair of **Golden Eagles**. An Otter showed for a few seconds and then not again.

After coffee beside a beautiful cork oak grove, we retraced our steps through the park, stopping at a viewpoint high over the Tiétar valley, where 440 **Great Cormorants** were resting on a beach. It was a wonderful sight.

We had a picnic under rather blustery conditions at the Tajadilla viewpoint, before making a brief stop at the Puerto de Serrana. The cloud was leaden and light diminishing, but a pair of sky-dancing **Bonelli's Eagles** provided some visual excitement.

We spent the rest of the afternoon at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint, where again vultures were passing, but we also paid attention to smaller birds: **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart** in particular.

On our way towards Trujillo, we made a final brief stop beside the Almonte River where a **Barn Swallow** was feeding alongside **Crag Martins**.

29th January 2019: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Santa Amalia and the Campo Lugar plains.

The day started quite bright and calm, but a strong westerly wind developed, bringing with it heavy cloud during the day.

We spent the day focused on **Common Cranes**. First, we visited the rice fields to the west of Madrigalejo, passing by the village of Palazuelo. Here there were thousands of **Common Crane** and we also saw a group of **Spoonbill**. From there we continued to the rice fields near Santa Amalia. There were fewer cranes there, but we did see groups of waders such as **Ruff** and **Black-tailed Godwit**. Returning to the Madrigalejo area we had coffee at Vegas Altas and visited the rice fields there. Most productive was an area on the outskirts of Madrigalejo, where due to the human activity around a patchwork of smallholdings, the cranes seemed more accustomed to people and vehicles.

We then spent an hour or so looking for cranes in dryer landscapes, in fields and *dehesa*. We saw some, but they were generally distant or rather nervous. We had lunch at the edge of the rice fields to the north of Madrigalejo which we then crossed, seeing a tractor working a field and attracting numerous gulls and egrets. We drove across the plains near Campo Lugar, but apart from a male **Hen Harrier**, there was not much to see, probably because of the strong winds. We completed the day back on the rice fields near Palazuelo, where we again saw thousands of cranes, and other birds such as **Avocet** and wintering **Grey Lag Geese**.

30th January 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Campo Lugar.

The day started quite bright and mild, but progressively there was more wind and cloud cover, until late afternoon when we had light rain. We spent the whole day on the open plains. We started on the plains north of Cáceres (to the west of Santa Marta de

Magasca). We had views of hunting **Merlin** and **Hen Harrier**, as well as the ubiquitous **Corn Buntings** and **Calandra Larks**, but despite careful searching we failed to find any bustards. An obliging **Hoopoe** was however some compensation. After coffee on the village of Monroy, we returned towards Trujillo and then just west of Trujillo we had our picnic. Whilst there, we saw a flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** and a solitary **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**.

We then headed south to the Campo Lugar plains, stopping at a couple of pools where there were two **Spoonbill** and a selection of duck including **Teal** and **Shoveler**. With darkening skies and the first drops of rain, we decided to call it a day and returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo for coffee by the fire in the sitting room.

31st January 2019: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Alcollarín Reservoir

The morning was generally overcast with frequent belts of mist and drizzle, with the wind increasing in strength with rain in the evening. We spent the whole morning on the rice fields and maize stubble just east of Madrigalejo, finding small groups of approachable cranes to photograph. We had a picnic beside the reservoir at Alcollarín, where visibility was low because of the mist and rain, but the sight of thousands of **Shoveler** by the dam wall was quite breathtaking.

We returned early to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with the weather closing in.

1st February 2019: Transfer to Madrid airport.

We left just before 09.15 for our return to Madrid, taking a stop for coffee at about half way through the journey. We had a smooth run through having had given ourselves time for any problems en route and to check on the departure of the flight from Madrid, given the wintry conditions in the UK.