

## HOLIDAY REPORT FOR DAVID

### Casa Rural El Recuerdo & Birding Extremadura

7<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020

#### Itinerary

**7<sup>th</sup> March 2020:** Transfer from Madrid

**8<sup>th</sup> March 2020:** Trujillo plains.

**9<sup>th</sup> March 2020:** Monfragüe National Park and River Almonte

**10<sup>th</sup> March 2020:** Sierra Brava, Campo Lugar Plains, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Alcollarín Reservoir.

**11<sup>th</sup> March 2020:** Villuercas Mountains

**12<sup>th</sup> March 2020:** Valdecañas dam, Arrocampo and Monfragüe

**13<sup>th</sup> March 2020:** Valverde de Mérida, Alange dam, Santa Amalia and Canchalejas Reservoir.

**14<sup>th</sup> March 2020:** Return to Madrid via Arrocampo Reservoir.



## TRIP REPORT

### 7<sup>th</sup> March 2020: Transfer from Madrid

David's flight arrived a little delayed (at 17.40) and we were leaving the airport shortly after 18.15. Apart from some busy traffic on the ring-road following the football match at the Atletico Madrid stadium, the journey was smooth, heading westwards into the setting sun. Silhouettes of **White Storks** were visible as we approached Talavera, the half-way stage in the journey. We made one brief stop to stretch our legs and arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo shortly after 21.00, where dinner awaited us.

### 8<sup>th</sup> March 2020: Trujillo plains.

It was a fine day, with sunshine and blue skies in the morning, making midday quite warm. Some gathering cloud in the afternoon brought a brief shower of rain as we returned to base.

We spent the day on the plains to the west and briefly to the east of Trujillo. Throughout the day at every stop we were heralded by the song of **Calandra Larks**. Often **Crested** or **Thekla Larks** were also present. We had excellent view of **Iberian Grey Shrike** at our first stop at the edge of the plains and some flocks of **Spanish Sparrows**. **Red Kites** were the first raptors airborne. At a second stop we had good views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** on the ground and a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle**.

We continued past the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, spending the latter part of the morning on the plains there, seeing a fine **Little Owl** and some **Lesser Kestrels**.

Our picnic was beside the River Tamuja where we were treated to an excellent view of a **Bonelli's Eagle**, quickly followed by **Short-toed Eagle**.



North of the village we rose again to the high plains, where we saw a male **Montagu's Harrier** and a solitary **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. There were good numbers of **Spanish Sparrows**. A quick visit was made to the plains east of Trujillo, where four **Little Bustards** were the highlight. We then returned to the area we had first visited where we were blessed by superb views of a group of 14 Great Bustard, a few of which even put on a display of their courtship dance for us. Superb!

### **9<sup>th</sup> March 2020: Monfragüe National Park and River Almonte**

It was another fine sunny day, with some freshness in the wind during the afternoon.

Before we headed off, David watched the **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** drumming in the garden.

We headed north to the Monfragüe National Park, passing through a wonderful *dehesa* in the Biosphere reserve and entering the park from the north at the Portilla del Tiétar. As soon as we arrived, we heard and then saw a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and during our stay there we had some excellent views of this magnificent bird. A strong supporting cast included **Black Stork**, **Egyptian Vulture**, **Rock Bunting** and a beautiful **Otter**. We also had glimpses of the top of a head of an **Eagle Owl**, quietly incubating on its nest.



From there we spent most of the rest of the day in the park, making good use of the various viewpoints. **Griffon Vultures** were the most common bird in the skies and occupying the rock faces, but we also saw a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles**, several **Black Stork** and **Egyptian Vultures**, **Golden Eagles** and **Short-toed Eagles**. At our picnic we had a lovely view of a newly arrived singing **Subalpine Warbler**.

We concluded our stay at the magnificent Peña Falcón rock face, where along with the birds already mentioned we were treated to prolonged views of a **Blue Rock Thrush**.

On our return across the undulating *dehesas* towards Trujillo, we stopped at the River Almonte where there was a loud chorus of **Iberian Water Frogs**. Above us a **Golden Eagle** soared for a moment in a thermal with **Griffon Vultures**.

### **10<sup>th</sup> March 2020: Sierra Brava, Campo Lugar Plains, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Alcollarín Reservoir.**

We enjoyed another sunny warm day, with hardly a breath of wind. Heading south, we stopped first beside the Sierra Brava reservoir where we found an **Eagle Owl** roosting. From there it was just a short distance to the plain of Campo Lugar where we admired a wonderful troop of **Great Bustards** including some displaying males. A party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** were also present. We then entered the mostly dry rice fields near Madrigalejo. Our target here was **Bluethroat** and at our second stop we spotted one flying from an irrigation ditch. We managed to relocate the bird and then watched it on and off for over half an hour. It was a stunning male in full breeding plumage. We then repaired to the Alcollarín Reservoir for a picnic lunch in the shade, watching migrating **Black Kites**. We checked the reservoir, finding **Black-necked Grebe** and some **Spoonbill**, as well as a range of duck. Following lunch, we returned to Campo Lugar and visited a small pool where **Spoonbill** and several duck species were present. We drove back across the Campo Lugar plains and back down to the rice fields. Here, close to a reed-filled river where **Marsh Harriers** were displaying, we found a group of **Red Avadavats**. We then returned via Sierra Brava, seeing a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and a **Common Crane** on the way.

### **11<sup>th</sup> March 2020: Villuercas Mountains**

A hot and almost windless day and perfect for heading to the mountains. Our destination was the Villuercas range, about an hour east of the house. We stopped first just south of the pilgrimage town of Guadalupe to walk beside a stream, with mixed woodland along its banks. Here there were **Siskin**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and numerous **Blackcap** and **Robin** in song. From there we ascended the highest point of the range with a stop *en route* to see the medieval snow well. At the peak there were some obliging **Rock Buntings** and **Black Redstarts** as well as **Griffon** and **Egyptian Vultures**. The views from the peak across much of Extremadura were extraordinary. We descended beside the Almonte River and stopped for a picnic north of the village of Roturas. Here we had good views of **Short-toed Eagle** and **Griffon Vultures**. **Clouded Yellow** butterflies were also present. We stopped again beside the Almonte river, downstream from a gorge to watch a pair of **Cirl Buntings** busy preening after bathing. We then went to the tiny village of Cabañas del Castillo, tucked below two cliffs. Here we met Pedro who took us to a secret location frequented by an overwintering **Wallcreeper**. It took just over an hour for this little gem of a bird to appear, feeding briefly on the cliff before us before flying off. We elected to wait a bit longer and shortly before our agreed departure time the bird miraculously reappeared and blessed us with truly wonderful views. At the same place we also saw **Black Stork**, **Short-toed Eagle** and **Egyptian Vulture**.

We returned well-satisfied to base.



#### **12<sup>th</sup> March 2020: Valdecañas dam, Arrocampo and Monfragüe**

It was another warm and settled day. As we approached Trujillo a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** was being chased by a **Magpie**. We headed north-east, making our first stop in a small wooded valley close to the Valdecañas dam. Here there was lots of bird song: **Blackcaps**, **Wren**, **Robin**, but we could not detect any of the hoped-for Hawfinches.

We then continued to the Arrocampo Reservoir, where we found a pair of **Black-winged Kites** and had good views of **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Purple Swamphen**, a male **Little Bittern** and a **Booted Eagle** in flight.

We then spent the rest of the day in the Monfragüe National Park, having excellent views of the incubating **Eagle Owl** and the **Spanish Imperial Eagle** at the Portilla del Tiétar. We had lunch close to a bird's drinking area where species like **Chaffinch** and **Great Tit** were present, but alas no Hawfinches either. Finally, we made a stop again the hugely impressive Peña Falcon viewpoint, seeing **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Bunting**, and the vast throngs of **Griffon Vultures**, amongst which were **Black Stork**, **Egyptian Vulture** and **Peregrine**.

#### **13<sup>th</sup> March 2020: Valverde de Mérida, Alange dam, Santa Amalia and Canchalejas Reservoir.**

It was somewhat cooler in the morning, with patches of fog on the drive down, but the sun came out for us in the afternoon.

We drove south-west and stopped to have a good view of a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoos** on the wat towards Santa Cruz de la Sierra. We then took the motorway, leaving it near Valverde de Mérida to make a brief stop at small old gravel working.

Here **Sedge Warblers** were singing. We then continued to the dam at Alange and spent the rest of the morning walking with the reservoir on one side and rocky slopes with olive trees on the other. Our target here was **Black Wheatear** and eventually we had very good views of two pairs. Other birds seen included many **Thekla Lark**, **Alpine Swift**, **Crag Martins**, **Rock Bunting** and **Blue Rock Thrush**.



After our picnic there we checked the mostly dry rice fields near Santa Amalia, but a few wetter areas had a few waders (**Black-tailed Godwit** and **Little Ringed Plover**) as well as good numbers of **White Wagtails** and **Meadow Pipits**. We spent the remainder of the afternoon next to the small reservoir of Canchalejas, where there were a good number of **Ruff** and a selection of other waders including **Greenshank** and Common Sandpiper. A **Common Cuckoo** was calling just as we turned to leave to return to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

#### **14<sup>th</sup> March 2020: Return to Madrid via Arrocampo Reservoir.**

We made our departure from Casa Rural El Recuerdo, enjoying another fine and sunny morning. We stopped at Arrocampo Reservoir for a final opportunity to bird in Extremadura, with several good views of **Purple Swamphen**, **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, and **Penduline Tit**.

We then set off for Madrid and reached the airport as planned just before 14.00 with plenty of time to check-in.

## List of species seen

1. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
2. **Common Shelduck:** Seen at Sierra Brava.
3. **Wigeon:** Seen on pools at Campo Lugar and at Alcollarín.
4. **Gadwall:** Seen on pools at Campo Lugar and at Alcollarín.
5. **Teal:** Seen on several days.
6. **Pintail:** Small numbers at Alcollarín.
7. **Mallard:** Seen every day.
8. **Shoveler:** Present at all reservoirs and most large pools.
9. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on three days.
10. **Little Grebe:** Seen on several days.
11. **Great Crested Grebe:** Present on all large water bodies.
12. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín Reservoir.
13. **Great Cormorant:** Seen daily.
14. **Little Bittern:** Seen at Arrocampo.
15. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
16. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Roosts at Arrocampo.
17. **Little Egret:** Seen on several days.
18. **Great White Egret:** Seen on several days.
19. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
20. **Black Stork:** Seen most days.
21. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
22. **Spoonbill:** Seen on pools at Campo Lugar and at Alcollarín.
23. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
24. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
25. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen most days.
26. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen most days.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen in Monfragüe National Park and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
28. **Golden Eagle:** Seen on several days
29. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Seen in Monfragüe National Park and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
30. **Booted Eagle:** Seen at Arrocampo.
31. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
32. **Black Kite:** Seen daily.
33. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost every day.
34. **Hen Harrier:** One seen in Villuercas Mountains.
35. **Montagu's Harrier:** One near Santa Marta de Magasca.
36. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
37. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on one day.
38. **Black-winged Kite:** Two at Arrocampo.
39. **Peregrine:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains and Monfragüe.
40. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
41. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
42. **Merlin:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
43. **Water Rail:** Heard at rice fields.
44. **Moorhen:** Seen on two days.
45. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
46. **Common Coot:** Seen on large water bodies.
47. **Common Crane:** Seen on three days.

48. **Little Bustard:** Seen on the plains east of Trujillo.
49. **Great Bustard:** Seen on plains near Campo Lugar and near Trujillo.
50. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on two days.
51. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
52. **Golden Plover:** Seen on plains.
53. **Lapwing:** Seen on several days.
54. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields.
55. **Ruff:** Seen on rice fields and Canchalejas Reservoir.
56. **Common Snipe:** Seen on rice fields and Canchalejas Reservoir.
57. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Small numbers on rice fields near Santa Amalia.
58. **Common Redshank:** Seen at Alcollarín.
59. **Greenshank:** Seen on rice fields and Canchalejas Reservoir.
60. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on several days.
61. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Canchalejas Reservoir.
62. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen most days.
63. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on most days.
64. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and Campo Lugar.
65. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
66. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
67. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
68. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
69. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen on three days.
70. **Eagle Owl:** Seen at Sierra Brava Reservoir and Monfragüe.
71. **Little Owl:** Seen on three days.
72. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange and Arrocampo.
73. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
74. **Iberian Green Woodpecker:** Heard in Villuercas Mountains.
75. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen on two days.
76. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente.
77. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
78. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
79. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
80. **Woodlark:** Seen on one day.
81. **Skylark:** Seen on the plains..
82. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
83. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen at Monfragüe.
84. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
85. **House Martin:** Seen almost daily.
86. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
87. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
88. **Water Pipit:** Seen on rice fields.
89. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen near Guadalupe.
90. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
91. **Wren:** Recorded almost daily.
92. **Robin:** Seen most days.
93. **Bluethroat:** Seen on rice fields.
94. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
95. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
96. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Alange.
97. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen in Monfragüe, the Villuercas Mounatish and Alange..
98. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.



99. **Song Thrush:** Seen on a few days.
100. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen on two days.
101. **Cetti's warbler:** Seen on most days.
102. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen on several days.
103. **Sedge Warbler:** Seen near Valverde de Mérida and Arrocampo.
104. **Dartford Warbler:** Recorded briefly on two days.
105. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen in Monfragüe.
106. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
107. **Blackcap:** Recorded most days.
108. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** Heard singing in Monfragüe.
109. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen almost every day.
110. **Long-tailed Tit:** Recorded on three days.
111. **Blue Tit:** Seen most days.
112. **Great Tit:** Seen daily.
113. **Nuthatch:** Seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
114. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Calling on two days.
115. **Wallcreeper:** One seen in Cabañas del Castillo.
116. **Penduline Tit:** Seen in Arrocampo.
117. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
118. **Jay:** Seen on three days.
119. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
120. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
121. **Jackdaw:** Seen most days.
122. **Red-billed Chough:** Heard in Villuercas Mountains.
123. **Raven:** Seen most days.
124. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains.
125. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
126. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
127. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
128. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
129. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
130. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
131. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
132. **Serin:** Seen on several days.
133. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
134. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
135. **Siskin:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
136. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
137. **Hawfinch:** Seen just briefly.
138. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
139. **Rock Bunting:** Seen on several days.
140. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.