

BIRDING EXTREMADURA AND CASA RURAL EL RECUERDO

LATE AUTUMN HOLIDAY FOR SUE, PHILIPPA AND VAL

3rd November – 13th November 2021



Walking near La Garganta

Itinerary

3rd November 2021: Transfer from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

4th November 2021: Visit to the Villuercas Mountains.

5th November 2021: The Sierra de Bejar and Ambroz valley

6th November 2021: The Plains of Campo Lugar and the Alcollarín Reservoir

7th November 2021: Sierra Brava Reservoir, rice fields near Palazuelo and Santa Amalia. Drop off in Mérida.

10th November 2021: Collection at Mérida, lunch at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, afternoon Trujillo.

11th November 2021: Monasterio of Yuste, Arrocampo Reservoir, Monfragüe National Park.

12th November 2021: The plains west of Trujillo

13th November 2021: Return to Madrid.

TRIP REPORT

3rd November 2021: Transfer from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

The flight from Stansted arrived ahead of schedule and procedures were quick at the airport, so we were heading out of Madrid on the southern ring road in very good time. Although the traffic was heavy around Madrid, once we were on the motorway heading to Extremadura, it was a very smooth run. Throughout most of the journey we were accompanied by the view north of the Gredos Mountains.

The landscape was a beautiful green, thanks to the recent autumn rain, which had left pools of shallow water in many fields. **Red Kites** were seen patrolling the way, and on one occasion we saw a flock of **White Storks**. A pause was had for coffee about halfway and we then proceeded to base, arriving at Casa Rural El Recuerdo just before 6 p.m.

4th November 2021: Visit to the Villuercas Mountains.

We set off just before 09.30 to a calm and sunny morning. Our route took us initially through the Holm Oak *dehesas* south through Zorita, to Logrosán and Cañamero. From here, the deciduous Pyrenean Oak took over as the dominant species. We stopped close to the town of Guadalupe for a very pleasant walk through mixed woodland beside the Guadalupe stream, past an old water mill. The leaves were turning and Strawberry Trees bore their red eponymous fruits, as well as the small white, bell-like flowers. Nettle Trees carried little black berries, tasting like dried dates. There were numerous small woodland birds, such as **Long-tailed Tits**, **Nuthatches** and **Chaffinches**. We watched a party of **Iberian Magpies** swooping into a fruiting tree. **Red Kites** soared overhead.

We then visited the church at Guadalupe and had a coffee in the little square in the centre of the pretty town, dominated by the church and monastery. Afterwards, we headed up to the peak of the Villuercas on the newly surfaced road that had been used for the Vuelta de España this year.



Despite the height (1600 metres) there was hardly any wind, and the views were amazing: the superb example of Appalachian Relief in the foreground, and the Gredos Mountains as a backdrop. **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart** were actively feeding amongst the boulders.

We descended on steep road through Pyrenean Oak, Sweet Chestnut, and scree slopes, and stopped at a picnic area overlooking the River Almonte, as it cut a gorge and headed west. **Griffon Vultures** glided overhead. We crossed to the other side of the ridge, to view the gorge from the sunlit side. Vultures were coming into land on the warm rocks. Nearby is the little village of Cabañas del Castillo and here we walked to take in again the stunning landscape, and the silence. Butterflies visited crucifers in flower on sun-warmed banks, whilst **Crag Martins** and a **Red-rumped Swallow** hawked little insects. We returned to base across a gently undulating *dehesa* landscape.

5th November 2021: The Sierra de Bejar and Ambroz valley

Setting off at 09.00 we took the motorway north to the very edge of Extremadura, where it borders the province of Salamanca. The journey took us through endless vistas of *dehesa*, which only changed as we approached the Tiétar valley near La Vera, where there were fields of tobacco and a more agricultural landscape. From there north of Plasencia, again, *dehesa* dominated the scenery, until we left the motorway and headed through the beautiful autumn colours of Sweet Chestnut and Poplar to the tiny village of La Garganta, the second highest settlement in Extremadura. The small road climbed through to the edge of pinewoods, broken by rounded granite outcrops and small hillside pastures.

David Lindo was waiting for us there and he joined us on a three-hour walk on a spur which offered us welcome shelter from a biting north-east wind. There was a dusting of snow which covered the high moorland above us, whilst gorgeous shapes of granite emerged on the hillside and amongst the pines. It was fresh but with a cloudless sky.





The highlight bird-wise were the **Crossbills**, seen initially in flight and then, at the end, magnificently perched. There were also groups of **Redwings**, some **Rock Bunting**, **Coal Tits**, and fly over **Griifon** and **Black Vultures**, and a **Sparrowhawk**. After our sandwiches back at the vehicles, we visited the nearby wolf trap (wolves were present here until at least the 1960s) and an impressively deep icehouse set amongst the pines. After coffee near Hervas, we visited the magnificent Roman site of Cáparra, on the Silver Way. With the Sierra of Bejar as a backdrop, we explored the ruins, and marvelled at the four-pillared arch. Amongst birds seen were **Brambling** and a **Black Redstart**.



6th November 2021: The Plains of Campo Lugar and the Alcollarín Reservoir

It was another beautiful day, although with a fresh wind in the morning, which eased in the afternoon. We spent the morning on the open plains, near Campo Lugar, south of El Recuerdo. It was yet another very different landscape and with a different variety of birds. At our first spot we saw a male **Hen Harrier** and a small party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, but most memorable were the sheer numbers of small birds: **Calandra Larks, Meadow Pipits, Common Starlings** and **Corn Buntings**, as well as the amazing panoramic views. Small groups of **Common Cranes** were flying over, sightings heralded by their bugling calls.

After an excellent coffee in Campo Lugar, we continued to the Alcollarín Reservoir. The wind had eased and the water was calm. On the reservoir were large numbers of duck (**Shoveler, Mallard, Wigeon, Pintail, Gadwall, Teal** and some **Common Pochard**) and grebes (**Little** and **Great Crested**). At the shallow far end of the lake amongst a large group of **Common Coot**, Martin found a **Red-knobbed Coot** (very unusual in Extremadura) and there was a flock of **Black-tailed Godwits**. Most exciting was a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** which gave us superb and prolonged views in excellent light.

At our picnic area we watched a nice selection of small butterflies nectaring on the crucifers in flower. We completed our visit with a brief exploration of the western shore, watching the **Black-headed Gulls** having their pre-roost bath. From there we went to Trujillo, stopping to admire a **Golden Eagle** soaring with a **Griffon Vulture** at close range.

7th November 2021: Sierra Brava Reservoir, rice fields near Palazuelo and Santa Amalia. Drop off in Mérida.

Heading southwards again, we stopped first at the edge of the large Sierra Brava reservoir, seeing a perky **Little Owl** and then two more somnolent **Eagle Owls**. From where we stood, the expanse of irrigated agriculture stretched away to the south, from which we could hear **Common Cranes**.

Similarly at a stop beside the River Ruercas, and despite the burst of song from **Cetti's Warblers**, it was the calls of cranes that established the soundscape. Once we were driving through the rice fields, now mostly stubble, we started seeing groups of cranes, feeding on either side of the road, many as family parties. **Marsh Harriers** caused flurries of **Spanish Sparrows** to erupt from the stubble. In the reed-filled ditches were groups of **Common Waxbills** and **Red Avadavats**. Some fields had been ploughed and here we saw **Black-winged Stilts, Lapwings, Greenshanks, Cattle Egrets** and **Glossy Ibis**.

After a coffee stop, close to a line of poles each with nests of **White Storks**, we drove south-west and made another stop in the agricultural area near Santa Amalia. Here we simply stood in awe as several hundred **Common Cranes** filled the blue sky above us as they moved from some distant fields to another foraging area.



Then it was time to move onto Mérida for check-in at the apartment close to the Roman Bridge.

10th November 2021: Collection at Mérida, lunch at Casa Rural El Recuerdo, afternoon Trujillo.

Martin collected the team outside their apartment just after 10.30 and we returned to Casa Rural El Recuerdo to unpack, take a stroll in the garden and have a picnic lunch. We then went to Trujillo, walking up to the Arab fort, taking in the superb panorama and then exploring the medieval centre of the town. We had coffee in the main square as a group of **Common Cranes** flew overhead and **Crag Martins** came to settle on the stone buildings.

11th November 2021: Monasterio of Yuste, Arrocampo Reservoir, Monfragüe National Park.

Exploration of the history of Extremadura continued with a visit to the Yuste monastery, where Charles V completed his days. It is in a beautiful setting of Pyrenean Oak, with autumnal colours contrasting with the clear blue sky over the southern flank of the Gredos Mountains. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was calling as we arrived. Following the visit, we descended from La Vera, seeing people harvesting the peppers for the *pimentón*, and arrived at the Arrocampo Reservoir. This area had been fog bound when we passed through earlier, but now the sun was shining and we stood looking across the golden reeds and flashes of water. Our target was the **Purple Swamphen**, duly spotted.

We also had several excellent views of **Marsh Harriers**, but only brief views of **Bluethroats** and **Reed Buntings**. **Water Rail** and **Bearded Tits** were only heard. We had an excellent coffee in the tidy little village, whilst **Barn Swallows** hawked insects overhead. As we left the village, we had a superb view of a **Black-winged Kite** perched on a bush.

We then ventured to the Monfragüe National Park, having our sandwiches at the enchanted spot, the Portilla del Tiétar. Here **Griffon Vultures** soared overhead, **Cormorants** rested on rocks and we had a sighting of a male **Ring Ouzel**. The calmness of the place was magnificent, still water, reflecting the wonderful geological formations, bees humming as they visited Strawberry Trees in flower.

We continued through the park, stopping to look at the dams across the rivers and the Cardinal's Bridge, from the damp shade of the northern side of the ridge. The Peña Falcon viewpoint took us back to sunshine and more vultures, and a truly impressive rock face. We completed our visit with a fascinating guided tour of the rock art in a small cave (or fissure really) on a sun-lit cliff below the castle of Monfragüe, seeing art spanning six thousand years.



12th November 2021: The plains west of Trujillo

Another wonderful day, with clear blue skies, no wind and it became quite warm in the afternoon. We spent the day west of Trujillo (apart from a small diversion northward in the afternoon). Starting on the open plains close to Cáceres we found a magnificent group of over 60 **Great Bustards**. The warm weather even seemed to encourage a male to start displaying close to a female. In the area we also found a juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** perched on a roadside post and a small group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. A female **Hen Harrier** passed us closely at this point.

Stopping beside the River Tamuja, we timed our visit perfectly to enjoy a **Golden Eagle** fly close by and start soaring: it was oblivious to our presence.



After an excellent coffee in the small village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we paused beside the Magasca River, where the valley sides had a fine show of Autumn Buttercup, and then back onto to plains. Stopping by a Cañada Real (an ancient drovers' trail), we watched a fine male **Hen Harrier** and then an amazing flock of 88 **Little Bustards** moving from one field to another. A single Serotine Narcissus was in flower. There were also large numbers of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, although very distant. Almost all the time there were **Red Kites** in the sky. Just down the road, we interrupted a group of **Griffon Vultures** and a **Black Vulture** feeding on a dead lamb. We had superb views of them standing in the field.

We then headed on a small diversion to visit a very picturesque cork oak grove. Then back to the plains, where we had good views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** on the ground, a perched adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, a **Merlin** and yet another **Hen Harrier**. A group of **Spanish Sparrows** posed for us on a top of a bush.



After a stop to admire the western approach to Trujillo and a brief grocery stop, we were back at Casa Rural El Recuerdo by 17.30,

13th November 2021: Return to Madrid.

We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and set off before dawn for the run back to Madrid. The Gredos Mountains looked beautiful in a rosy light of the rising sun. A few **Red Kites** and **Griffon Vultures** were seen on the journey, as well as a skein of **Common Cranes**. We stopped for coffee halfway and then completed the journey in good time, arriving just before 10.30 at Madrid airport.



SPECIES LIST

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín and Sierra Brava reservoirs
2. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín.
3. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín.
4. **Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín.
5. **Pintail**: Seen at Alcollarín.
6. **Mallard**: Seen at Alcollarín and Sierra Brava reservoirs
7. **Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín.
8. **Pochard**: Seen at Alcollarín.
9. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen at Alcollarín and plains west of Trujillo.
10. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín.
11. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín.
12. **Great Cormorant**: Seen on reservoirs and at Monfragüe.
13. **Little Bittern**: Seen at Mérida.
14. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen at Mérida.
15. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.

16. **Little Egret**: Seen on rice fields and reservoirs.
17. **Great White Egret**: Seen at Alcollarín and the rice fields.
18. **Grey Heron**: Seen most days.
19. **White Stork**: Seen en route from Madrid, also on rice fields and at Mérida.
20. **Griñón Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
21. **Black Vulture**: Seen most days.
22. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
23. **Golden Eagle**: Seen near Alcollarín and near Santa Marta de Magasca.
24. **Bonelli's Eagle**: Seen at Alcollarín.
25. **Red Kite**: Seen every day.
26. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen most days.
27. **Hen Harrier**: Seen on plains at Campo Lugar and west of Trujillo.
28. **Common Buzzard**: Seen almost every day.
29. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen in Villuercas and La Garganta.
30. **Black-winged Kite**: Seen near Arrocampo.
31. **Common Kestrel**: Seen on several days.
32. **Merlin**: One west of Trujillo on plains.
33. **Water Rail**: Heard at Arricampo and on River Ruercas.
34. **Moorhen**: Seen at Alcollarín, rice fields and Arrocampo.
35. **Purple Swamphen**: Seen at Arrocampo.
36. **Common Coot**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
37. **Red-knobbed Coot**: One at Alcollarín.
38. **Common Crane**: Seen daily.
39. **Little Bustard**: Flock seen on plains west of Trujillo.
40. **Great Bustard**: Flock seen near Cáceres.
41. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on rice fields.
42. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen at Alcollarín.
43. **Kentish Plover**: Seen at Alcollarín.
44. **Golden Plover**: Seen on the plains west of Trujillo.
45. **Lapwing**: Seen daily.
46. **Common Snipe**: Seen on the rice fields.
47. **Black-tailed Godwit**: Seen at Alcollarín.
48. **Greenshank**: Seen on the rice fields.
49. **Green Sandpiper**: Seen on several days.
50. **Common Sandpiper**: Seen at Alcollarín.
51. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen on plains near Cáceres.
52. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen almost daily.
53. **Mediterranean Gull**: Seen on plains at Campo Lugar.
54. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains at Campo Lugar and near Cáceres.
55. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
56. **Feral Pigeon**: Seen most days.
57. **Stock Dove**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
58. **Wood Pigeon**: Seen on several days.
59. **Collared Dove**: Seen every day.
60. **Eagle Owl**: A pair seen at Sierra Brava reservoir.
61. **Little Owl**: Seen near Sierra Brava and on plains west of Trujillo.
62. **Kingfisher**: Seen on several days.
63. **Hoopoe**: Seen almost daily.
64. **Iberian Green Woodpecker**: One seen in Villuercas Mountains.
65. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
66. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Heard at Yuste monastery.

67. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on plains.
68. **Crested Lark**: Seen most days.
69. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on plains.
70. **Skylark**: Seen on plains
71. **Crag Martin**: Seen almost every day.
72. **Barn Swallow**: Seen at Arrocampo.
73. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Seen at Cabañas del Castillo.
74. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen daily.
75. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen near Guadalupe.
76. **White Wagtail**: Seen every day.
77. **Wren**: Seen in the Villuercas and La Garganta.
78. **Dunnock**: Seen in the Villuercas and La Garganta.
79. **Alpine Accentor**: One seen at La Garganta.
80. **Robin**: Seen daily.
81. **Bluethroat**: Seen at Arrocampo.
82. **Black Redstart**: Seen most days.
83. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
84. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen in the Villuercas and Monfragüe.
85. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
86. **Ring Ouzel**: One in Monfragüe.
87. **Song Thrush**: Seen in the Villuercas.
88. **Redwing**: Seen at La Garganta.
89. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen at Alcollarín.
90. **Cetti's Warbler**: Seen at Ruercas, Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
91. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on plains and at Arrocampo.
92. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen at La Garganta and Alcollarín.
93. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen on several days.
94. **Blackcap**: Seen every day.
95. **Chiffchaff**: Seen every day.
96. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on several days.
97. **Crested Tit**: Heard at Villuercas and La Garganta.
98. **Coal Tit**: Seen at La Garganta.
99. **Blue Tit**: Seen almost daily.
100. **Great Tit**: Seen on several days.
101. **Bearded Tit**: Heard at Arrocampo.
102. **Nuthatch**: Seen in the Villuercas.
103. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Seen in the Villuercas.
104. **Penduline Tit**: Present at Arrocampo.
105. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen on several days.
106. **Jay**: Seen on several days.
107. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
108. **Common Magpie**: Seen daily.
109. **Jackdaw**: Seen in Trujillo and Arrocampo.
110. **Carrión Crow**: Seen in La Garganta.
111. **Raven**: Seen most days.
112. **Common Starling**: Seen on the plains.
113. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
114. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
115. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen on the plains and rice fields.
116. **Rock Sparrow**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
117. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on the rice fields.

- 118. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields.
- 119. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
- 120. **Brambling:** Seen at Cáparra.
- 121. **Serin:** Seen most days.
- 122. **Greenfinch:** Seen on two days.
- 123. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
- 124. **Siskin:** Seen most days.
- 125. **Linnet:** Seen on three days.
- 126. **Crossbill:** Seen at La Garganta.
- 127. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at La Garganta.
- 128. **Reed Bunting:** Seen at Arrocampo.
- 129. **Corn Bunting:** Seen most days.

Butterflies seen

Clouded Yellow

Brown Argus

Small Copper

Small White

Bath White

Small Heath

Wall Brown