

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



LATE WINTER HOLIDAY TO EXTREMADURA FOR SUE AND PETER

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

12th – 20th February 2023



Itinerary

12th February 2023: Collection from Madrid

13th February 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca

14th February 2023: Campo Lugar plains, Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas, Moheda Alta and Palazuelo

15th February 2023: Monfragüe National Park

16th February 2023: Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir.

17th February 2023: Alange, Mérida and Montánchez

18th February 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and Miravete

19th February 2023: Cañamero, Villuercas Mountains and Trujillo

20th February 2023: Lagunas of Alcazar de San Juan and return to Madrid.

TRIP REPORT

12th February 2023: Collection from Madrid

Peter and Sue arrived on time at Madrid airport and we were leaving before 4.30 pm. The traffic was rather heavy on the ring road but was much lighter as we headed on the motorway south-westwards from the city, in the opposite direction to those returning after the weekend. We elected to drive non-stop, to get to Casa Rural El Recuerdo in good time. A **Black-winged Kite** was seen on the journey as well as some **Common Cranes** and **White Storks**.

We reached base just after 19.00, with a welcome meal ready for us.

13th February 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca

It was a sunny day, which started quite cold, with a fresh easterly wind, but later was quite warm. We explored the plains to the west of Trujillo, near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. A vast open landscape, but at our very first stop within just a few minutes we were watching a flock of 19 **Little Bustards** and getting excellent views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. **Calandra Larks** were in song around us and a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** was calling from nearby trees.

Very pleased with our good fortune, we then took a walk along a track, where more larks were seen, other small groups of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and a group of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** as well.

After a coffee in Santa Marta de Magasca, where **House Martins** were feeding, we drove southwards onto another area of plains. Here we watched a group of **Great Bustards** resting, as well as several **Little Owl**. But now birds of prey were getting active, and as well as **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, we saw a displaying pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**. Migrating **Common Cranes** were forming skeins overhead.

Our lunch stop was beside the Tamuja River. Here there was another pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, which as well as showing display, also drove out an intruding juvenile bird. More distantly we watched a soaring **Golden Eagle** and a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles**: all from the same spot.

Back on the plains, we saw a female **Hen Harrier** and large groups of **Golden Plover**. We completed the afternoon enjoying the sight of a flock of **Spanish Sparrows**, along with a few **House Sparrows** feeding in a field.

14th February 2023: Campo Lugar plains, Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas, Moheda Alta and Palazuelo



We enjoyed another dry day today, mainly sunny with a fresh easterly wind. Heading south we stopped at the edge of the Campo Lugar plains to have superb views of a group of male **Great Bustards**. The light was excellent, and we watched them at length as they fed and preened. The landscape changed dramatically as we continued just a few kilometres south to the flat flood plains of the Guadiana basin. Close to Madrigalejo we stopped beside an old gravel pit and watched fly-bys by two **Great Spotted Cuckoos** chasing each other. **Common Cranes**, **White Storks**, **Northern Lapwings** and **Golden Plover** were scattered across the surrounding pasture. Further on down the road we found several **Iberian Grey Shrikes** as well as a **Black-winged Kite**.

Moving south of the town, we visited the rice fields behind the village of Vegas Altas. Here we had good views of several **Water Pipit** and **Kentish Plover**, as well as **Common Crane**, **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and a **Yellow-crowned Bishop**.

Following coffee in the village we moved eastwards to the beautiful dehesa of Moheda Alta, where we picnicked in view of **Common Cranes** and **Woodlark**.



Returning to the arable land, we stopped at some wet muddy fields near Palazuelo. Here there was a lovely selection of waders, including **Dunlin**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Kentish**, **Little Ringed** and **Common Ringed Plover**. **White Wagtails** were numerous and two **Western Yellow Wagtails** were also present. Perhaps best of all were the large number of **Common Snipe**, feeding right out in the open.



15th February 2023: Monfragüe National Park

Today, wrapped up warm, we headed to the northern side of the Monfragüe National Park. Though sunny throughout the day, the fresh wind and quite a lot of standing around on exposed viewpoints, made the extra layers of clothing very welcome. We had a great start to the day, with an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** gliding along the hillside as we got out of the car. We were to enjoy several sightings of the pair of eagles present at the Portilla del Tiétar viewpoint. **Griffon Vultures** and **Black Vultures** cruised over the rockface. The loud whistles of **Otter** reverberated in the echo chamber of the gorge. We stared for a long time at the nesting ledge of the **Eagle Owl**, seemingly empty, until the incubating female rose from its depths and had a good preen. What a magnificent bird! **Angel's Tears Narcissus** clustered on the hill side around us.

We made our way through the park, stopping in a belt of pines where we heard **Crested Tit** and saw a **Golden Eagle** carrying nest material. After a cup of coffee in the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos, we stopped beside the Tagus River and had a wonderful view of a male **Hawfinch** sitting in bare tree beside us. After our picnic we took a short walk beside the river, **Black Vultures** in the air and a **Sparrowhawk** seen twice. As we returned to the car, we had an encounter with **Firecrest** that came so close that it brushed Martin's head.



We completed the afternoon at the Peña Falcon viewpoint, where dozens of **Griffon Vultures** glided above us. A **Peregrine** was also present, calling and gliding amongst the vultures.

16th February 2023: Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir.

Heading southwards today, we made our first stop beside a small pond near Zorita where there was a smart drake **Tufted Duck** and some **Black-winged Stilts** amongst other species. We

continued to the edge of the village of Campo Lugar. Here we enjoyed superb views of a flock of 23 **Stone Curlew**, including a displaying pair. Whilst we stood, a **Quail** called from an adjacent field. We continued exploring the western part of the Campo Lugar plains, seeing a variety of duck at a couple of pools and a superb pair of **Iberian Grey Shrikes** which were courtship feeding.

After coffee, from which we could watch a large colony of **House Martins** and five newly arrived **Lesser Kestrels**, we stopped at the River Alcollarín and then the reservoir where we had our picnic, in the shade of holm oaks beside a small dam where **Great White** and **Little Egrets** stood. As well as an interesting range of ducks present on the water, the shoreline also supported birds like **Thekla Lark** and a pair of early **Red-rumped Swallows**. We completed our visit on the western shore, seeing a fabulous **Black-necked Grebe** and a party of **Spoonbills**.

17th February 2023: Alange, Mérida and Montánchez

It was not as cold first thing, but a fresh north-easterly wind meant that when we were not birding in sheltered places, it stayed quite chilly. We drove south-westwards, to the dam of Alange, where we walked beside a rocky outcrop, with stony slopes and olive groves on one side and the Alange reservoir on the other. Our sought-for species here was **Black Wheatear** and we had excellent views of a pair. **Thekla Larks** were common, and we had fine views of these too.

After coffee, we drove the short distance to Mérida, Extremadura's capital city, where we visited the Roman Bridge, spanning the Guadiana River. Here we watched **Purple Swamphen**, some roosting **Black-crowned Night Herons** and lovely views of a male **Penduline Tit** feeding. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was heard and then briefly seen.

We had our picnic beside the Aqueduct of the Milagros. On the canal beside it, were **Black-winged Stilt**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Green Sandpiper** and **Grey Wagtails**, along with numerous **Common Chiffchaffs**.

We completed the day in the Montánchez area, first at the castle overlooking the small town and affording us amazing views over the centre of Extremadura. We then ascended the hill overlooking the town, where we failed to find Alpine Accentor, but had gorgeous views of a male **Cirl Bunting**.

18th February 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and Miravete

An overcast morning and there was light rain intermittently as well, backed up by a fresh easterly wind. In the afternoon however, the clouds thinned and there was some sunshine.

We spent almost the whole day exploring the shores of the Arrocampo Reservoir, seeing a variety of birds. The best moments were at the end of our visit when we watched from a single spot a female **Little Bittern** fishing, very successfully, a **Squacco Heron**, a **Purple Swamphen** with chicks, as well as both **Little** and **Great White Egret**. During the day we also saw with varying levels of quality views: 18 **Black-crowned Night Heron** (a magnificent sight of roosting birds), a **Bluethroat**, **Reed Bunting**, several **Marsh Harriers**, **Glossy Ibis** and **Cattle Egrets**.

On our return we made a stop beside the old National Road near Miravete where there was a stunningly blue **Blue Rock Thrush**, a **Mistle Thrush**, **Woodlark** and **Black Redstart**, the latter being one of the most ubiquitous species of the week.

19th February 2023: Cañamero, Villuercas Mountains and Trujillo

It was another rather overcast morning, with a shroud of high grey cloud. We headed south-east, making our first stop beside the River Ruercas near Cañamero. Here we walked beside some gallery forest of alder, with the river showing still the devastation of the heavy rain in early December. As we returned to the car, we had absolutely superb views of a pair of **Dipper**, with one sitting on a stone pillar on a bridge, quite an unusual location for the species! We made the ascent to the highest peak in the Villuercas, following the footsteps of the Vuelta cyclists a few years ago. It was rather windy at the top, but we had brief and frustrating views of a small party of **Alpine Accentor**, which despite our determined efforts did not reappear. Lower on the slopes, in an area of mixed woodland, we were surrounded by the sounds of **Crested Tits**, **Short-toed Treecreepers**, **Nuthatches** and **Iberian Woodpeckers**, but only a **Firecrest** and **Long-tailed Tit** graced us with their appearances.



We returned to the Ruercas River for our picnic where we were rewarded by a **Bonelli's Eagle** soaring with **Griffon Vultures**. A sortie to the pines near Cañamero was also frustrating in the proximity of unseen **Crested Tits**. We had better luck in some beautiful cork oak near Solano where we saw at least, **Short-toed Treecreeper** and **Nuthatches**. At the nearby River Almonte gorge, we took in the sight of soaring **Griffon Vultures** in front of the rock face, so typically an Extremaduran scene.



On our return we stopped at the silos in Trujillo to watch the **Lesser Kestrels** recently returned from West Africa, most of the birds that were settled to perch were females, but we did also get a view of two smart male birds.

20th February 2023: Lagunas of Alcazar de San Juan and return to Madrid



We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and setting off at 8.00 made the three-hour drive to the town of Alcazar de San Juan in the region of Castilla La Mancha. We visited the Laguna de Veguilla, right on the outskirts of the town and viewed the reed-fringed lake from two vantage points. Our target here was **White-headed Duck**, Europe's only "stiff-tail" duck, mainly occurring in Spain and Turkey. There is a good population on here and it was indeed the first bird that we saw. Beside a group (which were mostly asleep) were also four **Marbled Duck**, another rare and localized species. They were accompanied by **Shoveler**. At our second stop, we enjoyed a vast flock of **Common Pochard**, in which we found a **Ferruginous Duck** and several **Red-crested Pochards**. There was a flock of **Greater Flamingo** and a wonderful number of **Black-necked Grebes**, showing all of the plumages from winter to full-breeding. We had an hour or so to enjoy this wonderful area.



It was then onto Madrid, and we arrived at the airport perfectly as planned at 14.00.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

Whilst the drought last year and resultant huge reduction in rice cultivation reduced the diversity and numbers of some wintering birds, we saw all the "Extremadura" specialities well.

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Pairs seen on several water bodies.
2. **Wigeon**: Several hundred at Alcollarín.

3. **Gadwall:** Small numbers on pools on plain, at Alcollarín and Alcazar de San Juan.
4. **Teal:** Small numbers on pools on plain, at Alcollarín and Alcazar de San Juan.
5. **Mallard:** Seen almost every day.
6. **Shoveler:** Small numbers on pools on plain, at Alcollarín and Alcazar de San Juan.
7. **Marbled Duck:** Four at Alcazar de San Juan.
8. **Red-crested Pochard:** Seen at Alcazar de San Juan.
9. **Common Pochard:** Several hundred at Alcazar de San Juan.
10. **Tufted Duck:** A male on pool near Zorita on 5th February.
11. **Ferruginous Duck:** A drake at Alcazar de San Juan.
12. **White-headed Duck:** About 60 at Alcazar de San Juan.
13. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on three days.
14. **Common Quail:** Heard at Campo Lugar and Alange.
15. **Little Grebe:** Seen on four days.
16. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange.
17. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alcazar de San Juan.
18. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on four days.
19. **Greater Flamingo:** Seen at Alcazar de San Juan.
20. **Little Bittern:** A female seen at Arrocampo.
21. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen at roost in Mérida and Arrocampo.
22. **Squacco Heron:** One at Arrocampo.
23. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on four days, with large numbers near Mérida and Arrocampo.
24. **Little Egret:** Seen on four days.
25. **Great White Egret:** Single figures seen on three days.
26. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
27. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
28. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Arrocampo.
29. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Alcollarín.
30. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
31. **Black Vulture:** Seen on three days.
32. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Five individuals seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and a pair at Monfragüe.
33. **Golden Eagle:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and at Monfragüe.
34. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and near Cañamero.
35. **Red Kite:** Seen every day.
36. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost every day.
37. **Hen Harrier:** Two ringtails seen during the week.
38. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost every day.
39. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on two days.
40. **Black-winged Kite:** One near Madrigalejo and on drive from Madrid.
41. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen at Campo Lugar and Trujillo.
42. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost every day.
43. **Peregrine Falcon:** Seen in Monfragüe.
44. **Water Rail:** Heard on two days.
45. **Moorhen:** Seen on three days.
46. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
47. **Common Coot:** Seen on most large water bodies.
48. **Common Crane:** Seen on all but one day.
49. **Little Bustard:** A party of 19 on plains on 13th February.

50. **Great Bustard**: Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Campo Lugar.
51. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on small pools and rice fields.
52. **Stone Curlew**: 23 near Campo Lugar village on 16th February.
53. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen on rice fields.
54. **Ringed Plover**: Small numbers on rice fields.
55. **Kentish Plover**: Small numbers on rice fields.
56. **Golden Plover**: Flocks seen on several occasions on open habitat.
57. **Northern Lapwing**: Seen almost every day.
58. **Dunlin**: Small numbers on rice fields.
59. **Common Snipe**: Seen on three days.
60. **Black-tailed Godwit**: Seen on two days.
61. **Greenshank**: Seen on two days.
62. **Green Sandpiper**: Seen on plains and rice fields, especially along canals.
63. **Common Sandpiper**: Seen on two days.
64. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen most days.
65. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen almost daily.
66. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and near Vegas Altas.
67. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains on 13th February.
68. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon**: Seen daily.
69. **Woodpigeon**: Seen on four days.
70. **Collared Dove**: Seen daily.
71. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: Seen near Madrigalejo and heard on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
72. **Eagle Owl**: One seen at Monfragüe.
73. **Little Owl**: Seen or heard almost daily.
74. **Kingfisher**: Seen on three days.
75. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
76. **Iberian Green Woodpecker**: Heard in the Villuercas.
77. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen on two days.
78. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen at Mérida.
79. **Calandra Lark**: Seen most days and especially common on the plains.
80. **Crested Lark**: Seen most days.
81. **Thekla Lark**: Seen most days.
82. **Woodlark**: Seen on two days.
83. **Skylark**: Seen on plains and rice fields.
84. **Crag Martin**: Seen on four days.
85. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
86. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Two at Alcollarín.
87. **House Martin**: Seen most days.
88. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen almost daily.
89. **Water Pipit**: Seen on rice fields.
90. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen on three days.
91. **White Wagtail**: Seen almost daily.
92. **Western Yellow Wagtail**: Seen on rice fields.
93. **Wren**: Seen most days.
94. **Dipper**: Pair on River Ruercas near Cañamero.
95. **Alpine Accentor**: Seen briefly on Pico de Villuercas.

96. **Robin**: Seen daily.
97. **Bluethroat**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
98. **Black Redstart**: Seen daily.
99. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
100. **Black Wheatear**: Pair at Alange.
101. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen on several days.
102. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
103. **Song Thrush**: Seen daily.
104. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on 18th February.
105. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded on most days.
106. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen most days.
107. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen at Alange.
108. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen most days.
109. **Blackcap**: Seen almost every day.
110. **Common Chiffchaff**: Seen daily.
111. **Firecrest**: Seen on two days.
112. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on three days.
113. **Crested Tit**: Heard on two days.
114. **Blue Tit**: Seen most days.
115. **Great Tit**: Seen daily.
116. **Nuthatch**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
117. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Seen on two days.
118. **Penduline Tit**: Seen on two days.
119. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen almost daily.
120. **Jay**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
121. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
122. **Common Magpie**: Seen daily.
123. **Jackdaw**: Seen most days.
124. **Raven**: Seen most days.
125. **Common Starling**: Seen near Campo Lugar.
126. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
127. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
128. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen most days.
129. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields.
130. **Yellow-crowned Bishop**: Seen on rice fields.
131. **Common Waxbill**: Seen at Arrocampo.
132. **Chaffinch**: Seen almost daily.
133. **Serin**: Seen daily.
134. **Greenfinch**: Seen on four days.
135. **Goldfinch**: Seen on several days.
136. **Linnet**: Seen most days.
137. **Hawfinch**: Seen on four days.
138. **Cirl Bunting**: Seen at Montánchez.
139. **Rock Bunting**: Seen at Alcollarín.
140. **Reed Bunting**: Seen at Arrocampo.
141. **Corn Bunting**: Seen almost daily.

Other notable wildlife

Mammals

Otter

Egyptian Mongoose

Rabbit

Butterflies

Green-striped White

Brimstone

Holly Blue

Speckled Wood