

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



EARLY SPRING HOLIDAY TO EXTREMADURA FOR DEBORAH AND JOHN

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

1st – 9th March 2023



Itinerary

1st March 2023: Transfer from Madrid

2nd March 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Pago de San Clemente

3rd March 2023: Villuercas Mountains

4th March 2023: Plains east of Cáceres and Parque Principe

5th March 2023: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo

6th March 2023: Monfragüe National Park

7th March 2023: Alange

8th March 2023: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo

9th March 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

1st March 2023: Transfer from Madrid

John and Deborah arrived on time at Madrid and just after 17.00 we were heading off on the early evening drive to Extremadura. Traffic was quite heavy on the ring road, but by taking the short toll road, we avoided the congestion typical at that time of day at the exit for the Extremadura motorway. Thus, we were soon crossing the vast arable plains of Castilla La Mancha, before the landscape started to change halfway on our journey, near Talavera. Now the snow-capped Gredos Mountains were close to our north and the typical dehesa woodland started to appear. It was evening as we ended Extremadura and dark by the time we reached Pago de San Clemente where Claudia welcomed us into Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

2nd March 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Pago de San Clemente

It was a crisp frosty start to the morning, but accompanied with the short drumming of **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, using the wooden telegraph pole near the front gate. Barn Swallows and a **Red-rumped Swallow** passed overhead against the cloudless sky.



We spent the day on the plains west of Trujillo, making our first stop to watch a party of **Little Bustard** and some **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. **Calandra Larks** sang above us and indeed there was hardly a moment whilst on the plains during the day when we could not hear their song. Along a nearby dirt track we watched a group of male **Great Bustards** in display, with seeming just one female watching the show. A **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was initially perched on a tree and then flew by, being mobbed by a **Common Magpie**. More **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** were present in the fields, as well as numerous **Golden Plover** and **Northern Lapwing**. We also had excellent views of both **Thekla** and **Crested Larks**, within metres of each other.

After coffee in Santa Marta de Magasca where **House Martins** circled over the square and **Serins** sang, we stopped overlooking the River Tamuja and then had our picnic beside the River Magasca. Here there were **Crag Martins**, **Common Chiffchaffs** and some passing vultures.



Back on the plains, we had a superb view of a **Short-toed Eagle** and a prolonged observation of a male **Hen Harrier** quartering a crop. Further along, more **Golden Plover**, a very distant **Egyptian Vulture** and a close **Lesser Kestrel**. Groups of **Common Cranes** were taking advantage of the fine weather to start their north-eastward migration.

We made a final stop in the granite landscape near Trujillo, where several **Iberian Grey Shrike** were seen, as well as more **Thekla Lark**. Back at Pago de San Clemente, John had an afternoon recce and saw several **Black Redstart**, a **Hen Harrier** and **Short-toed Treecreepers**.

3rd March 2023: Villuercas Mountains

Another cloudless day, perhaps slightly less cold first thing. John had a very successful session before breakfast, photographing a male **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** drumming close to the front gate of the house. Following breakfast, we headed south-east, passing through Zorita, Logrosán and Cañamero, to make our first stop beside the River Ruercas, with steep rocky outcrops on both sides. Here we saw a **Bonelli's Eagle** gliding out to hunt. **Griffon Vultures** and a **Sparrowhawk** (the latter being mobbed by **Crag Martins**), were also of interest. Small birds close to where we sat included **Short-toed Treecreepers**. From there we climbed to the highest point in the Villuercas Mountains, at 1600 metres above sea-level. There were small pockets of snow still from that which had fallen a week earlier. Although bird wise it was quite quiet (**Rock Bunting**, **Black Redstarts** and **Crag Martins**, plus a showy **Egyptian Vulture**), the views were amazing over most of Extremadura and beyond. The conditions were also perfect, hardly any wind, and warm sunny weather.

We took the steep descent into the Almonte valley, where we stopped for a picnic, and where we saw another **Egyptian Vulture**, a wintering **Dunnock** and a distant **Short-toed Eagle**. We

stopped at the western side of the Almonte gorge, beautifully illuminated by the afternoon sun and enjoyed the sight of the **Griffon Vultures** wheeling in front of the cliff face. **Red-rumped Swallows** were also present. We took a route back through Deleitosa and then onto the A5 motorway, stopping again at the River Almonte, this time south of the village of Jaraicejo. At this beautiful spot there was an obliging **Green Sandpiper**, a **Water Pipit** and numerous **Common Chiffchaffs** to enjoy. It was a very satisfying end to a day taking us onto new terrain.

4th March 2023: Plains east of Cáceres and Parque Principe

The clear weather continued, with a frosty start and sunshine all day. Staring at the plains west of Cáceres we took a couple of dirt roads where we had close views of larks such as **Calandra**, **Thekla** and **Crested**, and saw two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. As on previous days, we saw large numbers of **Golden Plovers** and **Northern Lapwings**, winter birds that will be leaving during the course of the next two weeks. The rest of the day was spent in the urban setting of the Principe Park in Cáceres, the capital of the province. Although busy late morning with groups of children playing it soon emptied as people headed away for lunch, leaving the park remarkably quiet for a sunny Saturday. It was however full of birds. We saw 30 species of birds with pride of place **Hawfinches**, close and prolonged views of a male and female feeding on the ground, a pair of **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers**, including the female drumming. There was a strong supporting cast of **Iberian Magpies**, **Hoopoes**, **Grey Wagtails**, **Short-toed Treecreepers**, **Red-rumped Swallows** and numerous **Common Chiffchaffs** which were feeding on the ground.



5th March 2023: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo

The forecast change in the weather happened, with an overcast morning which developed after midday to some rain. This in turn fortunately eased off by early afternoon. The forecast as it was, we had elected to head to wetter habitats: the rice fields near Madrigalejo. We started along a road north of the town where we had good views of **Black-winged Kite** perched on a pole, two or three **Great Spotted Cuckoos**, **Iberian Grey Shrike** and our first **Woodchat Shrike** for the week. South of the town on a couple of wet muddy fields we had good views of **Common Snipe**, included two of the Icelandic subspecies, flocks of **Tree Sparrows**, **Water Pipits** and a **Western Yellow Wagtail** of the Iberian race.



After a coffee in the village of Vegas Altas, we returned to the **Black-winged Kite** road and saw two individuals, both seemingly trying to shelter from the rain with upstretched wings.

We resorted to having our picnic in the car, but chose a spot where we could check a river and saw both **Moorhen** and **Water Rail** coming out to feed.

We then moved to the rice fields near Palazuelo and had an excellent afternoon watching a good range of waders including some obliging **Little Ringed Plovers**, as well as **Kentish Plover**, **Common Ringed Plover** and **Black-tailed Godwits**. A **Merlin** flushed a large flock of **Meadow Pipits** and **Water Pipits**, as well as at least three **Iberian Yellow Wagtails** present.

On our return home, we stopped just south of Campo Lugar village and whilst parked there a **Black-winged Kite** appeared and hovered close to us, over the roadside verge. A day that had started with **Black-winged Kite**, with another episode at lunchtime, concluded in a wonderful finale.



6th March 2023: Monfragüe National Park

Whilst cloudy, the forecast today suggested that it would be largely dry, so with this advice we headed for the Monfragüe National Park. Indeed most of the time was dry, although there were some episodes of Scotch mist which shrouded out both our visibility as well as bird activity. That being said, we did tremendously well. At our first stop in the northern end of the park, we watched a brooding **Eagle Owl**, numerous **Griffon Vultures** and some **Black Vultures**. And in the vulture kettles appeared goodies like **Golden Eagle**, Spanish Imperial Eagle and **Black Stork**. **Rock Buntings** and a **Firecrest** were seen close to our viewpoint and we also watched a pair of **Otters** playing in the river. **Angel's Tears Narcissus** clustered on the banks.

We stopped in an area of pines, seeing **Egyptian Vulture** and **Short-toed Eagle**. Following a coffee in the hamlet of Villarreal de San Carlos, we had our picnic overlooking the Tagus River. Vultures glided overhead whilst closer to us a very colourful male **Hawfinch** unobtrusively foraged on the ground.

Our final stop was at the famous Salto de Gitano, overlooking the majestic Peña Falcon rock. We spent a lot of time here watching a fine male **Black Redstart**, as well as two **Blue Rock Thrushes**. In respites from the Scotch mist, two **Black Kite** and two **Short-toed Eagles** made their way through the gorge: evidence of the relentless urge of northward migration, notwithstanding the rather poor flying conditions.

7th March 2023: Alange

There was some heavy rain during the night, but breaks in the cloud were evident at breakfast time. There was a slight freshness to the wind, but by the afternoon the sunshine had made it

quite warm. We spent the whole day beside the Alange Reservoir, along a path leading from the dam towards the small town, beside rocky outcrops with scattered olive and almond trees.



Griffon Vultures wheeled overhead, sometimes joined with **Egyptian Vulture** and **Black Vulture**. We saw our first **Alpine Swift** as we set off on the walk. The dam is home to Extremadura's largest colony. A **Golden Eagle** dramatically appeared flying low across the water, startling a party of **Common Coot**. **Thekla Larks** sang their sweet melodies above us. We then found our target species, the **Black Wheatear** and spent the rest of the morning watching a pair, sometimes quite close to us. Other rock loving species: **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart** and **Rock Bunting** were also around.

After coffee we had our picnic lunch in the parking area, whilst a **Bonelli's Eagle** passed over high above us. Several **Short-toed Eagles** were seen during the day as well. We returned to the path and had further sightings of **Black Wheatear**, including a pair close to our picnic area. We also watched an **Iberian False Smooth Snake** making its way up the bank.

It was great to spend the whole day exploring this small area, in a distance of barely a kilometre we had seen about 50 species of birds, including three species of eagle.

8th March 2023: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo

With unsettled weather expected, we elected to return to the rice fields near Madrigalejo. In fact, although we set off in thick Scotch mist, quite quickly the day brightened and although it was generally cloudy, there were some periods of sunshine and, most importantly, it stayed dry.

We returned first to the road near Madrigalejo to see once again the pair of **Black-winged Kites**, this time sitting in a tree together, on our way there we had watched a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** being chased by **Common Magpies**. Another was seen along that road. The **Woodchat**

Shrike that we had seen previously was still present. A tractor working between tight rows of peach trees, attracted a throng of **White Stork** and **Cattle Egrets**.



We passed through Madrigalejo, seeing an **Egyptian Vulture** low over the edge of the town and then we entered the rice fields near Vegas Altas. A group of over thirty **Common Crane** were a surprise. There were perhaps fewer pipits and wagtails than previously, but that was compensated for by a wonderful encounter with a **Common Quail**, which sat still close to the car for several minutes before scurrying off through the edge of the rice stubble.

After coffee in Vegas Altas, we paid a visit to the River Gargaligas, where the vegetation had been swept clean by the food waters in early December. A pair of **White Stork** were on a nest nearby.

At Madrigalejo again, this time to stop at a filling station, we saw a **Golden Eagle** soaring over the town: two seemingly out-of place raptors in one morning almost at the same spot! We checked the kite road again, seeing one of the **Black-winged Kites** foraging over the peach orchards. We watched a magnificent flock of **Spotless Starlings** and **Spanish Sparrows**, and also a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** on the ground.

Lunch was beside the River Ruercas. **Common Snipe** flew up from the water course, a party of **Common Waxbills** were present and an **Iberian Chiffchaff** was in song.

Out on the rice fields in the afternoon, we saw a nice selection of waders, including **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Kentish Plover** and **Common** and **Little Ringed Plovers** and watched a **Common Snipe** at length, having frozen in position as we arrived. Interestingly as it regained composure and before slipping away it started to bob in the fashion of a Jack Snipe.

We completed the afternoon beside a wet field near Puebla de Alcollarín where there was the now expected selection of plovers (including a very smart male **Kentish Plover** and a very pale female), **Iberian Yellow Wagtails** and some rather showy **Water Pipits**.



9th March 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid

The day dawned damp and overcast, with a fresh breeze. Although we had very little rain later on, and the clouds broke, there was a strong westerly wind all day. We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and made our way north-east on the motorway, seeing an **Alpine Swift** as we crossed the Tagus River. Shortly afterwards we stopped at Arrocampo Reservoir near Saucedilla. As soon as we had stopped, we had good views of three **Penduline Tits**. There was a roosting group of **Black-crowned Night Herons** and we saw a **Little Bittern** in flight. The windy conditions made it difficult to find birds in the marsh, but we had further distant views of the **Penduline Tits** and a second male **Little Bittern**. At another viewpoint we saw two **Purple Swamphen**, as well as **Great** and **Little Egrets**. **Marsh Harriers** cruised over the reeds whilst a pair of **Buzzards** circled in the distance. There were groups of hirundines, including some **Sand Martins**. We made a visit to the west of the reservoir, and stopped at a hide beside a small pool where there were several **Green Sandpipers** and **White Stork**, a **Water Pipit** and a British **Pied Wagtail** alongside some **White Wagtails**. Close by we had excellent views of a juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** attracted to a carcass with **Black** and **Griffon Vultures**.

We had our picnic beside the first stop, and had another brief view of **Little Bittern**. As we started our journey to Madrid, we had a close view of a **Pallid Swift** and then another **Spanish Imperial Eagle**.

And so it was onward to Madrid, with little traffic, we reached the airport as planned, with a group of **Monk Parakeets** swooping over the ring road as we approached.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

The focus of the holiday was photography rather than seeing as many different species as possible.

1. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Alange.
2. **Gadwall:** Present on pool on plains west of Cáceres.
3. **Mallard:** Seen most days.
4. **Shoveler:** Seen on three days.
5. **Shelduck:** One on rice fields near Palazuelo.
6. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on two days.
7. **Quail:** One watched a very close range on rice fields near Vegas Altas.
8. **Little Grebe:** Seen on several days.
9. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alange.
10. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on most days.
11. **Little Bittern:** At least three seen at Arrocampo.
12. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** At least 12 roosting at Arrocampo.
13. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on four days.
14. **Little Egret:** Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
15. **Great Egret:** Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
16. **Grey Heron:** Seen on three days.
17. **Black Stork:** One seen at Monfragüe.
18. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
19. **Spoonbill:** One seen near Madrigalejo.
20. **Black-winged Kite:** About three seen at Madrigalejo and one near Campo Lugar.
21. **Black Kite:** Several seen in Monfragüe.
22. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
23. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen most days.
24. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen on all but one day.
25. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
26. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen almost daily.
27. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen most days.
28. **Hen Harrier:** Males seen on two days.
29. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on three days.
30. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
31. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on the plains, in Monfragüe and at Arrocampo.
32. **Golden Eagle:** Seen on the plains, in Monfragüe, Alange and Madrigalejo.
33. **Bonelli's Eagle:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains and at Alange.
34. **Lesser Kestrel:** seen on the plains.
35. **Common Kestrel:** Seen most days.
36. **Merlin:** A female seen on the rice fields.
37. **Peregrine:** Heard at Monfragüe.
38. **Water Rail:** Seen on rice fields and heard at Arrocampo.
39. **Moorhen:** Seen on three days.
40. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alange and at Arrocampo.
41. **Common Crane:** Migrating birds over the plains and a party seen on the rice fields.
42. **Little Bustard:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo.
43. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo.
44. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on rice fields.

45. **Common Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
46. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
47. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
48. **Golden Plover:** Large numbers present on the plains.
49. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen daily.
50. **Dunlin:** A few seen on the rice fields.
51. **Ruff:** One seen on the rice fields.
52. **Common Snipe:** Seen on four days.
53. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Small groups on the rice fields.
54. **Common Redshank:** One seen on the rice fields.
55. **Greenshank:** Seen on the plains and on the rice fields.
56. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on four days.
57. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen daily.
58. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** One seen on rice fields.
59. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Two seen east of Cáceres.
60. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Large numbers seen west of Trujillo.
61. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
62. **Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
63. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
64. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen on both visits to Madrigalejo.
65. **Eagle Owl:** Seen in Monfragüe.
66. **Alpine Swift:** Seen at Alange and near Arrocampo.
67. **Pallid Swift:** Seen near Arrocampo.
68. **Kingfisher:** Seen on four days.
69. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
70. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen on three days.
71. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen at Casa Rural El Recuerdo and in Cáceres
72. **Monk Parakeet:** Seen in Cáceres and Madrid.
73. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
74. **Crested Lark:** Seen most days.
75. **Thekla Lark:** Seen on three days.
76. **Woodlark:** Singing in Monfragüe.
77. **Skylark:** Seen on the plains and rice fields.
78. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
79. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
80. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
81. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen almost daily.
82. **House Martin:** Seen most days.
83. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
84. **Water Pipit:** Seen on rice fields, on River Almonte and at Arrocampo.
85. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Males of Iberian race seen on rice fields.
86. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on four days.
87. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily. A Pied Wagtail present at Arrocampo.
88. **Duncock:** Seen in Villuercas.
89. **Robin:** Seen daily.
90. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
91. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
92. **Black Wheatear:** Four seen at Alange.

93. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen on three days.
94. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
95. **Song Thrush:** Seen daily.
96. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen most days.
97. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen most days.
98. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on the plains.
99. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen daily.
100. **Blackcap:** Seen daily.
101. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** Singing birds at Alange and beside River Ruercas.
102. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen daily.
103. **Firecrest:** Seen in Monfragüe.
104. **Wren:** Seen most days.
105. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on several days.
106. **Blue Tit:** Seen daily.
107. **Great Tit:** Seen daily.
108. **Nuthatch:** Heard in Monfragüe.
109. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen most days.
110. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Arrocampo.
111. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
112. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen on both days near Madrigalejo.
113. **Jay:** Seen on three days.
114. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
115. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
116. **Jackdaw:** Seen on four days.
117. **Raven:** Seen most days.
118. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains east of Cáceres.
119. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
120. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
121. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
122. **Tree Sparrow:** Large flocks on rice fields.
123. **Common Waxbill:** Seen at River Ruercas and Arrocampo.
124. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
125. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
126. **Serin:** Seen daily.
127. **Greenfinch:** Seen on three days.
128. **Goldfinch:** Seen most days.
129. **Siskin:** Seen in Villuercas and River Ruercas.
130. **Linnet:** Seen almost daily.
131. **Hawfinch:** Seen most days, especially in Cáceres.
132. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Villuercas, Monfragüe and Alange.
133. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Other wildlife

Otter



Iberian False Smooth Snake

Spanish Terrapin