

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



AUTUMN HOLIDAY TO EXTREMADURA FOR SARAH AND MARK

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

20th – 26th September 2023



Itinerary

20th September 2023: Pick-up at Cáceres railway station and visit to River Almonte, Talaván and Monroy road.

21st September 2023: Trujillo and Alcollarín Reservoir

22nd September 2023: Monfragüe National Park

23rd September 2023: Campo Lugar plains, Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas River Gargaligas, Moheda Alra, Cubilar Reservoir, Palazuelo rice fields.

24th September 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Miravete Pass and Jaraicejo

25th September 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and Pico de Villuercas

26th September 2023: Return to Cáceres

TRIP REPORT

20th September 2023: Pick-up at Cáceres railway station and visit to River Almonte, Talaván and Monroy road.

Martin met Sarah and Mark at Cáceres railway station at midday, to set off for an afternoon's birding introduction on the plains north of Cáceres. It was a warm and sunny day and after collecting some snacks for lunch, we took the road north of the city. We made our first stop beside the Almonte River, taking a walk down a small ravine to the river side. Migrants like **Willow Warblers** and **Common Whitethroats** were in the wild olive trees, whilst overhead glided both **Black** and **Griffon Vultures**. We saw our first **Short-toed Eagle** of the day there, motionless high in the sky. As we retraced our steps from the river, we had views of a male **Black Wheatear**, one of the species that we were keen to find there.



We stopped for our picnic beside the rather overgrown reservoir at Talaván. Here we enjoyed watching **Thekla Larks** in song, as well as a party of **Northern Lapwing**, several **Grey Heron**, a **Green Sandpiper** and a rather stunning **Red-veined Darter**.

We spent the rest of the afternoon on the slow road back to Trujillo, crossing the Almonte river again (seeing more vultures) and then along the plains. Here we saw on many occasions **Whinchats**, **Northern Wheatears** and **Stonechats** perched on the fence beside the road, whilst the fields also produced birds like **Tawny Pipit**. A wonderful group of vultures on the ground gave us a good size comparison between them and the diminutive **Ravens**. As we approached Trujillo, groups of **Rock Sparrows** (*Humbug heads*) and **Spanish Sparrows** showed well. During the drive we had also seen **Iberian Grey Shrikes** and **Hoopoes**.

At Casa Rural El Recuerdo the time was spent watching **Iberian Magpies** before dinner.

21st September 2023: Trujillo and Alcollarín Reservoir

An overcast and rather windy day, and there were a couple of heavy showers in the afternoon. Sarah and Mark spent the morning exploring the beautiful historic town of Trujillo, visiting the magnificent Aarab fortress, which affords spectacular panoramic views, and then walking through the old town to meet with Martin in the Main Square. Parties of **Crag Martins** rested on the stone walls of a house overlooking the Plaza.

From Trujillo we drove to the village of Campo Lugar for coffee and then onto the Alcollarín Reservoir where we spent the rest of the day. We started our birding where the Río Alcollarín flows into the reservoir, where rafts of **Little Grebe** and **Great Crested Grebe** mingled. We were entertained by the feeding frenzy of **Great Cormorants** pushing small fish towards the shore, much to the delight of the waiting **Little Egrets** and **Grey Herons**. There was also a **Kingfisher**, the first of no fewer than seven seen during the afternoon.

We had our picnic beside a belt of trees and a small pool. The place was full of migrant passerines: **Pied** and **Spotted Flycatchers**, **Common Redstart**, **Willow Warbler** and **Garden Warbler**. A **Short-toed Eagle** was seen, and later also a **Booted Eagle**. **Corn Buntings** and **Hoopoes** were also present.

We completed the afternoon on the western shore, where we were able to get excellent views of **Kentish Plovers**, as well as **Little Ringed** and **Common Ringed Plover**. A group of **Spoonbill** stood haughtily on an island. Two **Black-necked Grebes** were found in amongst the hundreds of other grebes.

22nd September 2023: Monfragüe National Park



It was a fine and sunny day, although with quite a strong and sometimes fresh wind. **Red-rumped Swallows**, **Barn Swallows** and **House Martins** hawked for insects above the house.

We north from Trujillo firstly over a landscape dominated by granite and then over the vast undulating *dehesa* landscape, the wood pasture dominated by holm oak trees, broken only by the crossing of the Almonte River. As we approached the Monfragüe National Park we could see the east-west escarpment of quartzite rock, the castle on top and a deep gorge to its west. We left the main road and drove up a small road to a parking area close to the castle. From there we walked through wild olives to the top of the ridge, to survey the vast panorama to the north and to the south of us. Vultures glided past us, below us and at eye level.

We then made a stop at the dramatic gorge of Salto de Gitano, where the Tagus River cut through the quartzite. Here there were dozens of **Griffon Vultures**, as well as some **Black Vultures**.

It was time for coffee, so we stopped at the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos. Above the carpark we watched an **Egyptian Vulture** soaring overhead with two **Griffon Vultures**. **Crested Larks** were in the car park. After the refreshments we headed to the northern edge of the park, stopping at the attractive Portilla del Tiétar gorge and then took a look at a beautiful cork oak *dehesa*. Retracing our steps back into the park, seeing **Red Deer** (stags had been heard bellowing throughout the day), we stopped at the Tajadilla viewpoint for our picnic. A fine **Red Deer** stag was there at the edge of the car park.

The first part of the afternoon saw us taking a very pleasant circular walk from Villareal, through open woodland and scrub full of **Pied Flycatchers**, where we also found a suite of autumn flowers: **Autumn Squill**, **Autumn Snowflake** and **Merendera**.

We made our final stop at some drinking pools at the edge of woodland and were rewarded with a fine male **Hawfinch**, as well as **Garden Warbler**, **Blackcap**, **Pied Flycatcher**, **Robin** and **Blue Tits**.

23rd September 2023: Campo Lugar plains, Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas River Gargaligas, Moheda Alra, Cubilar Reservoir, Palazuelo rice fields.

It was a day with a clear sky and warm sunshine throughout, the wind which had been a bit on the fresh side yesterday, had eased significantly.

Before we headed off, we enjoyed watching a hovering **Short-toed Eagle** and a selection of finches including **Hawfinch**, **Goldfinch** and **Serin**.

We headed south, stopping first on the Campo Lugar plains south of the town of Zorita. Here we had excellent views of **Calandra Larks**, **Northern Wheatears** and **Whinchats**, some flight views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and also birds like **Tawny Pipit**, **Yellow Wagtail** and **Short-toed Lark**.

From there we descended into a more intensively cultivated area (rice fields and fruit orchards) where nevertheless we were blessed with a wonderful view of a **Black-winged Kite**.



South of Madrigalejo we stopped for coffee in the “rice village” of Vegas Altas and then did a quick drive around the rice fields behind the village, seeing **Marsh Harrier** and **White Stork**. At the River Gargaligas, hundreds of **Spanish Sparrows** were in the riverside vegetation.

We had a picnic in the wonderful surroundings of dehesa at Moheda Alta and then visited a nearby water body. Here we saw a flock of 44 **Greater Flamingos**, as well as **Spoonbills**, **Wood Sandpiper** and several ducks including **Red-crested Pochard**, **Common Pochard** and **Pintail**. At the larger Cubilar Reservoir, there was an **Osprey** and several rather distant waders including **Common Snipe**, **Greenshank** and **Black-winged Stilt**.



We completed the day in the rice fields near Palazuelo, where some of the crop had been harvested already. Here we saw male **Yellow-crowned Bishops**, more **Marsh Harriers** and a group of **Corn Buntings**. A flock of **Alpine Swifts** was unexpected. **Red-veined Darters** were present in their hundreds.

24th September 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Miravete Pass and Jaraicejo

It was sunny day and even hotter than previously, with the temperature reaching 30° C by the end of the afternoon. We headed first west, approaching Cáceres and taking the road for Santa Marta de Magasca. We spent the first hour of so on the plains, finding a flock of 18 **Great Bustards** which obliged us with superb views as well as several **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** in flight. **Calandra Larks**, **Thekla Larks**, **Northern Wheatears** and **Whinchats** were a wonderful supporting cast.

As we drove north, we had views of a **Little Owl** perched beside a nest box. At the River Tamuja a seemingly empty sky when we arrived slowly yielded birds like a displaying **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, a **Booted Eagle**, as well as the customary vultures. A **Kingfisher** was also seen there and a **Woodlark** sang in the distance.

We had coffee at the bar of the municipal swimming pool, where a mixed flock of **Spanish** and **House Sparrows** were feeding on the lawn.



We then headed north, stopping on the plains to admire the magnificent show of autumn bulbs in flower: **Serotine Narcissus**, **Autumn Snowflakes**, **Merenderas** and **Autumn Squills**. A **Red-underwing Skipper** was seen, as well as a **Small Copper** and **Bath White**.



With the mercury rising, we should a more suitable place for a picnic, with shade and a cooling breeze: at the Miravete Pass. Whilst we were there, we were happy to spot a **Black Stork** soaring in the distance.

Lower down we stopped at the Arroyo de la Vid and saw a **Common Whitethroat**, a distant immature **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, more vultures and the ever-teasing **Sardinian Warblers**. We made our final stop at the River Almonte south of Jaraicejo, where more **Sardinian Warblers** were glimpsed as well as **Pied Flycatchers**.

25th September 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and Pico de Villuercas



It was another hot sunny day, with barely any wind. We visited first the Arrocampo Reservoir, beside the village of Saucedilla where the conditions were perfect. The reservoir was created for the Almaraz nuclear power plant as a source of cooling water. The steady water levels and shallow banks are ideal for a wide fringe of reed mace and reeds, home to a large number of herons and egrets. We were not disappointed, within a minute of arriving we watched a fine **Squacco Heron** and shortly after that, a **Little Bittern** beside a **Western Swamphen** and its chick. Large numbers of **Barn Swallows** and **Sand Martins** fed low over the water. We found a juvenile **Purple Heron**, brilliantly concealed in the reeds. Later on an adult was seen in flight. As we made our way along a section of the marsh, we had views of **Bluethroat**, **Cetti's Warbler**, **Sardinian Warblers** and **Willow Warblers**. **Pied Flycatchers** and **Yellow Wagtails** were also present. Several **Glossy Ibis** flew past us. A lovely flock of nine **Great Egrets** accompanied by two **Little Egret** flew in to feed close to us.

After coffee near Deleitosa, we then took a complete change and headed east to the Villuercas Mountains. We stopped for lunch beside the La Calera natural swimming pool, where there was shade and even a couple bathing. From there we climbed the Almonte valley, through belts of recently harvested cork oak trees. taking a steep road to the highest point of the Villuercas range. We passed through sweet chestnut and Pyrenean Oak, before rising to more open country of heathers, stunted oaks and boulders.



At the peak we enjoyed watching on several occasions the beauty of a party of **Red-billed Chough** as they exalted in joy. **Griffon Vultures** passed by. Small birds included **Rock Bunting** and **Black Redstart** and we were very pleased to find a male **Blue Rock Thrush**. Butterflies at the peak included **Wall Brown** and **Rock Grayling**. The views across the Geopark were superb, the dramatic Appalachian Relief, and beyond the Sierra of the Gredos to the north and vast expanse of smaller sierras, dehesas and plains to the other sides.

A stop in Trujillo on our way back was made to buy some local products.

26th September 2023: Return to Cáceres

It was an early start, leaving at 07.30 in order to get to the railway station in good time for Sarah and Mark's return journey to Madrid. As we drove to Cáceres we passed again the pylon with perhaps 15 **White Stork** nests and as we entered the city, groups of **Jackdaws**, **Spotless Starlings** and **House Sparrows** were heading out of their roosts.

LIST OF BIRD SPECIES SEEN

1. **Egyptian Goose**: A large flock on Campo Lugar plains and also seen at Alcollarín.
2. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín, Moheda Alta and Arrocampo.
3. **Teal**: Seen at Talaván, Alcollarín and Moheda Alta.
4. **Mallard**: Seen at Alcollarín and Moheda Alta.
5. **Pintail**: Seen at Moheda Alta.
6. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen at Talaván, Alcollarín and
7. **Red-crested Pochard**: Seen at Moheda Alta.
8. **Common Pochard**: Seen at Moheda Alta.
9. **Little Grebe**: Large numbers at Alcollarín, also at Moheda Alta and Arrocampo.
10. **Great Crested Grebe**: Large numbers at Alcollarín, also at Moheda Alta.
11. **Black-necked Grebe**: Two at Alcollarín.
12. **Great Cormorant**: Seen most days.
13. **Little Bittern**: Seen at Arrocampo.
14. **Squacco Heron**: Seen at Arrocampo.
15. **Cattle Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo.
16. **Little Egret**: Seen most days.
17. **Great Egret**: Seen at Arrocampo.
18. **Grey Heron**: Seen daily.
19. **Purple Heron**: Seen at Arrocampo.
20. **Black Stork**: Seen over Miravete Pass.
21. **White Stork**: Seen at Vegas Altas.
22. **Glossy Ibis**: Seen at Arrocampo.
23. **Spoonbill**: Seen at Alcollarín and Moheda Alta.
24. **Greater Flamingo**: 44 present at Moheda Alta.
25. **Egyptian Vulture**: Seen at Monfragüe
26. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen every day.
27. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
28. **Osprey**: Seen at Cubilar Reservoir.
29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Seen at River Tamuja and near Jaraicejo.
30. **Short-toed Eagle**: Seen daily.
31. **Booted Eagle**: Seen on two days.
32. **Red Kite**: Seen on two days.
33. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen daily.
34. **Common Buzzard**: Seen almost daily.
35. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen in Monfragüe.
36. **Black-winged Kite**: One seen at Madrigalejo.
37. **Common Kestrel**: Seen most days.
38. **Water Rail**: Heard at Arrocampo.
39. **Moorhen**: Heard at Arrocampo and on the rice fields.

40. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
41. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Moheda Alta.
42. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains east of Cáceres.
43. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at Alcollarín and Moheda Alta.
44. **Common Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín.
45. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín and Moheda Alta.
46. **Kentish Plover:** Seen at Alcollarín.
47. **Northern Lapwing:** Small group present at Alcollarín and Talaván, also on the plains.
48. **Common Snipe:** Seen on three days.
49. **Greenshank:** Seen at Alcollarín and Moheda Alta.
50. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen most days.
51. **Wood Sandpiper:** Seen at Moheda Alta.
52. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen on three days.
53. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
54. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen at Alcollarín.
55. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains at Campo Lugar and near Cáceres.
56. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen almost daily.
57. **Woodpigeon:** Seen almost daily.
58. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
59. **Little Owl:** Seen on plains near Cáceres.
60. **Alpine Swift:** Seen near Palzuelo.
61. **Kingfisher:** Seen on three days.
62. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
63. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
64. **Greater Short-toed Lark:** Seen on the plains near Campo Lugar.
65. **Crested Lark:** Seen most days.
66. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
67. **Woodlark:** Seen at Pago de San Clemente.
68. **Sand Martin:** Seen at Arrocampo.
69. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
70. **Barn Swallow:** Seen almost daily.
71. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen daily.
72. **House Martin:** Seen almost daily.
73. **Tawny Pipit:** Seen on plains on three days.
74. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on two days.
75. **White Wagtail:** Seen at Arrocampo..
76. **Wren:** Seen on several days.
77. **Robin:** Seen on four days.
78. **Bluethroat:** Seen at Arrocampo.
79. **Black Redstart:** Seen on two days.
80. **Common Redstart:** Seen at Alcollarín.
81. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
82. **Whinchat:** Seen mainly on the plains.
83. **Northern Wheatear:** Seen mainly on the plains.
84. **Black Wheatear:** Seen on River Almonte.
85. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Pico de Villuercas.
86. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
87. **Cetti's Warbler:** Heard on several days and seen at Arrocampo.

88. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen on four days.
89. **Common Reed Warbler:** Seen at Arrocampo.
90. **Dartford Warbler:** Heard at Monfragüe.
91. **Sardinian Warbler:** Heard most days and seen well at Arrocampo.
92. **Common Whitethroat:** Seen on two days.
93. **Garden Warbler:** Seen at Alcollarín and Monfragüe.
94. **Blackcap:** Seen on four days.
95. **Willow Warbler:** Seen most days.
96. **Spotted Flycatcher:** Seen at Alcollarín.
97. **Pied Flycatcher:** Seen daily.
98. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
99. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
101. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen most days.
102. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
103. **Common Magpie:** Seen almost daily.
104. **Red-billed Chough:** Seen on Pico de Villuercas.
105. **Jackdaw:** Seen on the plains.
106. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
107. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
108. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
109. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on three days.
110. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on plains north of Trujillo.
111. **Common Waxbill:** Seen at Arrocampo.
112. **Red Avadavat:** Seen at Arrocampo.
113. **Yellow-crowned Bishop:** Seen near Palazuelo.
114. **Chaffinch:** Seen at Monfragüe.
115. **Serin:** Seen at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
116. **Goldfinch:** Seen on two days.
117. **Linnet:** Seen at Monfragüe.
118. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Monfragüe and Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
119. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Pico de Villuercas.
120. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

Other Wildlife of Note

Butterflies

Swallowtail

Cardinal

Rock Grayling

Wall Brown

Red-underwing Skipper

Bath White

Small Copper

Dragonflies

Migrant Hawker

Red-veined Darter

Reptiles

Spanish terrapin

Large Psammmodromus

Misc

Praying Mantis

Autumn flowers

Sea Squill

Autmn Squill

Merendera

Autumn Snowflake

Serotine Narcissus