

# BIRDING EXTREMADURA



**EARLY WINTER HOLIDAY FOR KORIANNE AND PAUL**

**Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura**

**21<sup>st</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023**



## **Itinerary**

**21<sup>st</sup> November 2023: Pick-up at Seville airport and afternoon at Hornachos.**

**22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023: Plains between Cáceres and Trujillo**

**23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023: Madrigalejo and Palazuelo rice fields**

**24<sup>th</sup> November 2023: Alcollarín Reservoir.**

**25<sup>th</sup> November 2023: La Garganta**

**26<sup>th</sup> November 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and Monfragüe National Park**

**27<sup>th</sup> November 2023: Villuercas Mountains**

**28<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Lagoon at Alcazar de San Juan and onward to Madrid**

## TRIP REPORT

### 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023: Pick-up at Seville airport and afternoon at Hornachos.

Martin met Korianne and Paul at Seville airport at 11.00 and we headed straight onto the ring-road and then onto the motorway heading north to Extremadura. Early morning fog had lifted and it was fairly overcast as we entered Extremadura, the landscape changing from the arable land near Seville to the dehesas and plains of southern Extremadura. We drove straight to the Sierra Grande de Hornachos, where a small town lay nestled below the crags, on top of which was an Arab fortress. As soon as we got out of the car we found our target species, a pair of **Black Wheatears**. A further pair was seen further along the short walk that we took. We also had excellent views of **Thekla Lark** and **Black Redstart**. The olive groves had **Blackcaps**, **Sardinian Warblers** and **Robins**. **Crag Martins** soared overhead, whilst higher still were groups of **Griffon Vulture** and an impressive **Cinereous Vulture**. **Red Kites** were numerous.



On the way to our next spot we had a good view of a juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. We spent the remainder of the afternoon at a viewpoint near Chozos de Llera. We failed to see Iberian Lynx, but saw **Raven**, **Red-legged Partridge**, **Green Sandpiper** and were teased by at least one **Dartford Warbler** and several **Iberian Green Woodpeckers**, heard but not seen.

We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 18.45, welcomed by Claudia.

### 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023: Plains between Cáceres and Trujillo

It was a beautiful day of clear sky, sunshine with little wind. We headed west towards the provincial capital of Cáceres and then entered the plains lying between Cáceres and Trujillo. On a Roller nest box we saw the first two of three **Little Owls** for the day. The vast almost treeless landscape often gives an empty feel, but as soon as one stops and starts looking, birds will be found. So it was today. At our first stop we saw a majestic male **Great Bustard**. There were

**Calandra Larks** and **Common Chiffchaffs** and a fine male **Hen Harrier** quartered a field, being mobbed by **Northern Lapwings**. Further along the same trail, we found a group of **Black bellied Sandgrouse** resting on the ground. On our return a delightful pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** sat together on a pylon. At a third stop, we found a flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** on the ground.



Just south of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca we were treated to a close juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and ubiquitous **Red Kites**. After an excellent coffee break in the village we stopped beside the Magasca River.





Back on the plains we had our picnic and then walked on an ancient drovers' trail. Here we found a flock of nearly 40 **Little Bustard** and a distant flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. We watched a **Merlin** successfully catch a **Meadow Pipit** in flight.

On our way back to Trujillo, stops along the road yielded **Spanish Sparrow**, more **Iberian Grey Shrikes** and **Iberian Magpies**.

We stopped in the main square of Trujillo to admire the wonderful historic centre of the town, and then took a circular walk up to the castle and through the medieval part of the town. **Common Cranes** passed overhead, calling, whilst around the buildings were **Crag Martins** and **Black Redstarts**, as well as **Spotless Starlings**.

**23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023: Madrigalejo and Palazuelo rice fields**



A fresh start to the day with some ice on the windscreen of the car and a wind with a nip to it during the latter part of the morning, but cloudless skies and very pleasant in the afternoon.

South of Zorita we crossed the plains and then entered the rice fields near Madrigalejo, seeing two **Black-winged Kite**. Beside a small flooded gravel put, **Cetti's Warblers** were singing and a male **Red Avadavat** was building a nest. Everywhere there were **Common Cranes**, parties calling in flight, others feeding in the fields. Over the fruit orchards there were flocks of **Iberian Magpies** and we saw a rather fine **Iberian Grey Shrike**.

We explored the rice fields north of the village of Vegas Altas, having excellent views of a female **Merlin** and many **Common Cranes**. We found a flock of **Yellow-crowned Bishops** and also **Common Waxbills**.



We stopped for lunch beside the Ruercas River, where there were hordes of **Common Chiffchaff** and very vocal **Water Rails** .



The afternoon was spent on the rice fields near Palazuelo. We had an excellent spread of waders, including **Avocet**, **Ruff**, **Spotted Redshank** and **Little Stint**. But most impressive was a huge group (over 1100) of **Glossy Ibis** and nearly 400 **Black-winged Stilts**. Plus hundreds of egrets and **Black-headed Gulls** following a tractor ploughing up muddy rice stubble.



24<sup>th</sup> November 2023: Alcollarín Reservoir.



It was a wonderful day of warm sunshine and no wind, absolutely perfect for a day at the Alcollarín Reservoir, just a just a thirty-minute drive away and set in a dehesa and granite



landscape. There was an excellent selection of waterbirds including **Common Shelduck**, **Pintail**, **Eurasian Wigeon** and **Red-crested Pochard**, thousands of **Shoveler**, as well as three species of grebe. We saw at five **Black Storks** and a party of **Spoonbills**. Birds of prey included **Osprey**, **Marsh Harrier**, **Sparrowhawk** and both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**. Small birds were also enjoyed such as **Sardinian Warbler**, lots of **Common Chiffchaffs**, **Kingfishers**, **White Wagtails** and **Serins**.

We had one distraction from the reservoir, to visit the village of Campo Lugar for coffee. On the southern edge of the village we had superb views of a flock of at least 30 **Stone Curlew**.

### **25<sup>th</sup> November 2023: La Garganta**

It was another day of superb weather: no wind, clear skies and warm sunshine, even though we had to scrape the ice off the windscreen before setting off. Our destination today was the extreme north of Extremadura, on the Sierra de Bejar, near the village of La Garganta. On the way we encountered some banks of fog close to the valley of the Tagus river, but we were quickly beyond their reach.

Stopping close to the border of the province of Salamanca we took an eight kilometre circular walk through high mountain pasture and scrub and woodland. The views across the north of Extremadura were superb and trees were in autumn colours.



Bird wise, it was a question of quality rather than quantity. On this habitat in winter, there can be long periods with little action. But during the morning we were rewarded with superb views of **Dartford Warbler**, **Rock and Cirl Bunting**, **Goldcrests** (including one feeding on the ground), **Firecrests**, **Crested Tits** and **Short-toed Trecreeper**. On some fruiting trees as we were completing the walk we had good views of **Siskins** and **Bramblings**.



We returned to base via the Monfragüe National Park, stopping for half an hour at the Puerta de Serrana where **Griffon** and **Cinereous Vultures** circled over us on the late afternoon thermals.

### **26<sup>th</sup> November 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and Monfragüe National Park**

It was another crisp morning as we headed north-east on the motorway towards the reservoir of Arrocampo, beside the village of Saucedilla. Before we had arrived we had entered a dense bank of fog. This hung over the wetland during our entire visit, creating a very atmospheric setting, but limiting visibility enormously.

Despite this we quite quickly found a male **Little Bittern** and during the morning walk also species like **Western Swamphen**, **Reed Bunting**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Cetti's Warbler** and heard several **Water Rails**. **Common Chiffchaffs** were everywhere and there were also large flocks of **White Wagtails** and **Meadow Pipits**. A **White Stork** clacked its bill as it stood on its nest. There were some wonderful mixed flocks of **Spanish** and **House Sparrows** and **Goldfinches** feeding on seed heads.

We took advantage of the nearby café to warm our hands on glasses of café con leche and then took another brief visit to the wetland, before continuing onto the Monfragüe National Park.

Here the fog had recently risen and dispersed, so there was a hazy sunshine during our visit. Griffon Vultures were just starting to open their wings and dry them off.

At various stops we watched both **Griffon** and **Cinereous Vultures**, a distant **Golden Eagle**, and many smaller birds like **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Eurasian Jay**, **Siskin** and **Chaffinch**.

Surprisingly we could hear rutting **Red Deer** stags, and we saw a few females and youngsters.



## 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023: Villuercas Mountains

The day started with thick fog and as we drove south through Zorita and onwards to Logrosán, if anything it became thicker and thicker. It looked set in for the whole day, so the only option was to get above it. So heading for the top of the Villuercas Mountains was the plan.

As we left Guadalupe, we rose and then ascended to the peak of the Villuercas, and as we did so we moved from fog to brilliant sunshine, as we drove through woodland of deciduous oak, some with still some autumn colours.

At the peak, we had the wonderful sight of being above an ocean of clouds as far as the eye could see, with just the mountain tops and ridges below us emerging. Only a **Black Redstart** was present, but the experience of the vast panorama was reward enough.



We made our way back down hill (seeing two **Roe Deer** as we descended) and stopped at the wooded valley where we encountered a good mixed flock of birds, including **Long-tailed Tits**, **Great Tits**, **Blue Tit**, **Nuthatch** and a **Short-toed Treecreeper** heard but not seen. However, a pair of **Eurasian Bullfinches** was a lovely surprise.

We returned through the small town of Guadalupe and then onto the western side of the mountain range, still enjoying wonderful sunshine. At our picnic stop we had good views of two **Duncock**.

Entering an area of cork oak, we stopped to watch the **Griffon Vultures** and at last got good views of a **European Nuthatch**. Just a little way further on our sought-after **Bonelli's Eagle** at last made an appearance.



We visited the little village of Cabañas del Castillo, and crossed the River Almonte, before leaving the sunshine and crossing many kilometres of dehesa and then the plains to the north-east of Trujillo, this time under murky overcast conditions.

**28<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Lagoon at Alcazar de San Juan and onward to Madrid**



It was a mild but foggy morning as we bade our farewells to Casa Rural El Recuerdo. The thick fog remained for the first two hours of the journey but once we had entered the rolling arable



land of La Mancha it had cleared and the sun came out. Traditional windmills and castles were situated atop pointed hills, a landscape reminiscent of Don Quixote indeed!

We arrived at the lagoon beside the town of Alcazar de San Juan just before noon and straightway were watching our target species: the **White-headed Duck**. Over the hour or so that we spent at the site we had great views of several dozen of these odd-looking duck, with their grossly swollen bills.

There were also good numbers of **Black-necked Grebes**, some **Western Swamphen**, ducks including **Red-crested Pochard** and **Common Pochard**, a few dozen **Greater Flamingos** and close to a flock of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, two **Whiskered Tern** in winter plumage.

**Marsh Harriers**, a large flock of **White Stork** and three Common Cranes all added to the visual feast. It was an excellent postscript to the Extremadura holiday.

From there it was an easy run to Madrid on almost traffic-free roads until we hit the busy traffic as we entered the city. Notwithstanding this, we reached the airport for the drop-off at just before 3pm.

#### LIST OF BIRD SPECIES SEEN

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: A small group seen on the rice fields.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín.
3. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Alcollarín.
4. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín.
5. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín, on the plains and at Alcazar de San Juan.
6. **Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín and on the plains
7. **Mallard**: Seen on most days.
8. **Pintail**: Seen at Alcollarín.
9. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen on four days, huge numbers at Alcollarín.
10. **Red-crested Pochard**: Seen at Alcollarín and at Alcazar de San Juan.
11. **Common Pochard**: Seen at Alcollarín and at Alcazar de San Juan.
12. **Tufted Duck**: Seen at Alcollarín.
13. **White-headed Duck**: Seen at Alcazar de San Juan.
14. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on four days.
15. **Common Quail**: One seen briefly on the road at the rice fields.
16. **Little Grebe**: Seen on most days.
17. **Great Crested Grebe**: Large numbers at Alcollarín.
18. **Black-necked Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín and at Alcazar de San Juan.
19. **Great Cormorant**: Seen on three days.
20. **Little Bittern**: Seen at Arrocampo.
21. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Seen at Arrocampo.
22. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on three days.
23. **Little Egret**: Seen on three days.
24. **Great Egret**: Seen on three days.
25. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
26. **Black Stork**: Seen at Alcollarín.
27. **White Stork**: Seen most days.
28. **Glossy Ibis**: Big flock on the rice fields.

29. **Spoonbill:** Seen on three days.
30. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen every day.
31. **Cinereous Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
32. **Osprey:** Seen at Alcollarín.
33. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on three days with superb views!
34. **Golden Eagle:** One seen in Monfragüe.
35. **Bonelli's Eagle:** One seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
36. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
37. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
38. **Hen Harrier:** Males seen on the rice fields.
39. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
40. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on three days.
41. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen on the rice fields near Madrigalejo.
42. **Common Kestrel:** Seen most days.
43. **Merlin:** Seen on two days.
44. **Peregrine:** Seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
45. **Water Rail:** Heard on two days.
46. **Moorhen:** Recorded on four days.
47. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo and at Alcazar de San Juan.
48. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and at Alcazar de San Juan.
49. **Common Crane:** Seen almost daily.
50. **Little Bustard:** Seen on plains north of Trujillo.
51. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains east of Cáceres.
52. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on the rice fields.
53. **Avocet:** Two on the rice fields.
54. **Stone Curlew:** Seen near Campo Lugar.
55. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
56. **Common Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
57. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
58. **Golden Plover:** Seen on three days.
59. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen almost daily.
60. **Dunlin:** Seen on the rice fields.
61. **Little Stint:** Seen on the rice fields.
62. **Ruff:** Seen on rice fields.
63. **Common Snipe:** Seen on three days.
64. **Spotted Redshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
65. **Common Redshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
66. **Wood Sandpiper:** Seen on the rice fields.
67. **Greenshank:** Seen on two days.
68. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on three days.
69. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Alcollarín.
70. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen most days.
71. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on three days.
72. **Whiskered Tern:** Two at Alcazar de San Juan.
73. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains and near the rice fields.
74. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen north of Trujillo and east of Cáceres.
75. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
76. **Woodpigeon:** Seen on three days.



77. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
78. **Little Owl:** Seen on the plains.
79. **Kingfisher:** Seen on two days.
80. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
81. **Iberian Green Woodpecker:** Heard near Hornachos and in the Villuercas.
82. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard on two days.
83. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
84. **Crested Lark:** Seen most days.
85. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
86. **Woodlark:** Seen on two days.
87. **Skylark:** Seen on four days.
88. **Crag Martin:** Seen on most days.
89. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen on several days.
90. **Water Pipit:** Seen on the rice fields.
91. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen at Alcollarín.
92. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields.
93. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
94. **Wren:** Seen/heard on several days.
95. **Dunnock:** Seen in the Villuercas.
96. **Robin:** Seen daily.
97. **Bluethroat:** Seen on the rice fields.
98. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
99. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
100. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Hornachos.
101. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen on four days.
102. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
103. **Song Thrush:** Seen most days.
104. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen at Alcollarín.
105. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded on several days.
106. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen on most days.
107. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on three days.
108. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
109. **Blackcap:** Seen every day.
110. **Chiffchaff:** Seen almost daily.
111. **Goldcrest:** Seen at La Garganta.
112. **Firecrest:** Seen at La Garganta.
113. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on four days.
114. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
115. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
116. **Coal Tit:** Seen at La Garganta.
117. **Nuthatch:** Seen in the Villuercas.
118. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen on two days.
119. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
120. **Eurasian Jay:** Seen on three days.
121. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
122. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
123. **Jackdaw:** Seen on two days.
124. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.

125. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
126. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
127. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen almost daily.
128. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields.
129. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields.
130. **Yellow-crowned Bishop:** Seen on the rice fields.
131. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
132. **Brambling:** Seen at La Garganta.
133. **Serin:** Seen on three days.
134. **Greenfinch:** Seen on one day.
135. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
136. **Linnet:** Seen on three days.
137. **Siskin:** Seen on several days.
138. **Eurasian Bullfinch:** Seen in the Villuercas.
139. **Hawfinch:** Seen on two days.
140. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen at La Garganta.
141. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at La Garganta.
142. **Reed Bunting:** Seen at Arrocampo.
143. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

## **Mammals**

Red Deer

Roe Deer

Rabbit