

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



LATE WINTER HOLIDAY TO EXTREMADURA FOR JANET AND PETER

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

3rd – 10th February 2023



Itinerary

3rd February 2023: Pick-up in Madrid and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

4th February 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.

5th February 2023: Plains of Campo Lugar and the Villuercas Mountains.

6th February 2023: Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo, Palazuelo rice fields and Alcollarín Reservoir

7th February 2023: Monfragüe National Park

8th February 2023: Sierra Brava Reservoir, Vegas Altas, Puerto Peña, Campo Lugar plains.

9th February 2023: Alange, Properina Reservoir and Roman Bridge Mérida.

10th February 2023: Monfragüe rock paintings, Miravete Pass, Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid.

TRIP REPORT

3rd February 2023: Pick-up in Madrid and transfer to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

Janet and Peter arrived ahead of schedule at Madrid, to a beautiful winter's day with clear blue skies and snow lying on the peaks of the Guadarrama Mountains north of the city. We were quickly heading out of the city, notwithstanding a few places of heavier traffic on the ring-road. Once out on the motorway however, heading to Extremadura we made very good progress. Our plan to have lunch at the first service station as we entered the province of Toledo was thwarted as it was very full with people who had made an early start for the weekend. At the second, there was a power cut. Third time lucky, we found the next stop available and enjoyed a tasty lunch, quickly served at our table. We did some birding at the edge of the service station afterwards, seeing **Black Redstart**, **Spanish Sparrow**, **Spotless Starling**, **Crested Lark** and **Song Thrushes** amongst the olives nearby. On the journey that followed, we saw several **Red Kite**, **Marsh Harrier**, **White Stork** and **Common Kestrels**. The impressive Gredos Mountains formed a backdrop to our north and we passed a series of different landscapes, from the wide arable plains of the La Mancha to the start of the holm oak *dehesa* once we had passed Talavera. From there we started to see family groups of **Common Cranes**, either amongst the trees or in flight.

We reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 17.30. There was time for Janet and Peter to do a little birding along the lanes, seeing species like **Barn Swallow**, **Iberian Magpies** and a migrating skein of **Grey Lag Geese**.

4th February 2023: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca



A glorious day of settled, sunny weather, with some frost at the start but it certainly became warmer during the day. We explored the plains west of Trujillo, starting close to the provincial capital Cáceres. At our first stop we were bowled over by the magnificent sight of a large flock of **Great Bustard**, resting in glorious morning light. There were **Little Owls** perched nearby and **Calandra Larks** singing. A juvenile **Egyptian Vulture** was a surprise. Small pools held parties of **Gadwall** and **Teal**. **Northern Lapwing** were scattered across the landscape, present in every field. We made our way northwards, making a stop overlooking the Tamuja River, where we watched a juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** following the edge of the valley. Following a coffee at Santa Marta de Magasca, we stopped beside the Magasca River where **Crag Martins** hawked insects. A **Hawfinch** flew across the river. Back on the plains we watched **Common Chiffchaffs** flycatching from a solitary eucalyptus tree. Following our picnic we walked along a wide drovers' trail, watching a group of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** assemble at what was probably a carcass. **Corn Buntings** and **Calandra Larks** were in song. **Golden Plover** were in small groups. We saw some **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** landing in a distant field, and reaching a suitable viewpoint, we were able to watch the group feeding in a sheep pasture. From the same spot we saw a distant flock of **Little Bustard** in flight, so retracing our steps we eventually found a point (curiously very close to where we had lunch), where we could observe the **Little Bustards**, without disturbing them, as they slowly melted into the greyish mass of dry thistles.

We then headed towards Trujillo, stopping to watch a mix finch flock, with some very smart **Spanish Sparrows**. Our final stop was on the plains close to Trujillo. We had a good view of **Crested** and **Calandra Larks** here and enjoyed the peace of the late afternoon, before returning back to base.

5th February 2023: Plains of Campo Lugar and the Villuercas Mountains.

The fine weather continued, and we headed south through the town of Zorita and on to the edge of the Campo Lugar village. Just south of the village we found a winter roost of **Stone Curlew** with a total of 23 birds seen, standing in superb morning light. From there we took a dirt road to a couple of small pools, where **White Storks** were resting on their migration and there was a selection of ducks, **Great White Egret** and **Spoonbill**. As we were leaving a dark raptor glided across our view. It was a **Black Kite**, the first for the year for Martin and we quickly relocated it and enjoyed good views of it in flight and perched. Across the plains we saw numerous **Calandra Larks** and **Corn Buntings**, as well as several **Hoopoe**. Just as we were leaving a group of three **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flew in but landed just out of view.

We then returned to Zorita and stopped for coffee at Logrosán where a **Serin** sang in the sunshine. We continued to Cañamero and had a walk and a picnic beside the River Ruercas where we watched **Dippers** in song and feeding in the water. There were several **Siskins** in the riverside alders, **Griffon Vultures** soared overhead and a **Blue Rock Thrush** was spotted on the outcrops nearby.

After lunch we ascended to the highest point in the Villuercas Mountains, where we had extraordinary views, as far as the Guadarrama Mountains almost 200 km away. It was fairly quiet birdwise, apart from **Crag** and **House Martins**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstart**. On the descent we visited the old Ice House, from which we watched a pair of **Peregrines** soaring with **Griffon Vultures**.



6th February 2023: Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo, Palazuelo rice fields and Alcollarín Reservoir



Our first stop was briefly to stand at the edge of the Campo Lugar plains in beautiful early morning light, watching small groups of **Common Cranes** in the fields and a **Calandra Lark** singing from a stone. Beyond the lark was a party of **Little Bustards**, moving quietly through the greyness of dried thistle stems. **Hoopoes** sat on posts and rocks, a wonderful number of these compelling birds.

We then continued southward, taking an east turn just prior to Madrigalejo. Along a road which divided fruit farms on one side and rough pasture on the other, we had lovely views of a **Black-winged Kite**, and **Iberian Grey Shrike**. A **Great Spotted Cuckoo** was heard, but not seen. But we did have a good view of a **Wryneck**, hopping in the pasture beside some rushes. We then moved westwards across the dry earth fields that would normally be rice stubble but, for the drought last year, had remained barren. There were few birds but a stunning male **Hen Harrier** was a treat as it cruised past the car.



Beside some wetter fields, which held a small assortment of waders, we were treated to gorgeous views of a male **Bluethroat**, in almost full breeding plumage. There were **Spanish Sparrows** and **Tree Sparrows** as well along the way.

After a coffee near Campo Lugar, we proceeded to the Alcollarín Reservoir where we had our picnic and spent the rest of the afternoon. The weather was glorious, calm, sunny and warm. **Barn Swallows** hawked insects and, on the water, in perfect light, we watched an assemblage of duck, dominated by **Wigeon** and **Shoveler**. Three species of grebe were present, whilst on land, amongst the oak trees and granite boulders we had our best views so far of **Thekla Larks**. Two **Iberian Hares** were a welcome mammal sighting as well.

7th February 2023: Monfragüe National Park

A rather fresher day, thanks to a chilly north-easterly wind which was a constant feature throughout. We headed north to spend the day in the Monfragüe National Park, the jewel in the crown of Extremadura's treasures. Starting at the Portilla del Tiétar, a **Golden Eagle** was seen, sadly only by Martin as we arrived. However, it did not take long for a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** to appear with the **Griffon Vultures** that were "surfing" the head winds. One bird was barely a sub-adult, but was paired with the adult. A **Peregrine** also appeared. We were delighted when a **Black Stork** put on a show as well, soaring above us and making its way

southwards. Careful searching rewarded us with the sight of an **Eagle Owl** sitting at a nest site. We were blessed with superb views of this wonderful bird.

After our sojourn there, and feeling a bit cold, we elected to head to coffee, finding a bar open at the Villareal de San Carlos hamlet. We then visited a couple of viewpoints before our picnic, all the time with vultures soaring above us. Spanish Milk Vetch was in flower, as were banks of Angel's Tears Narcissus.

After a stop to admire some geology, we walked along the bank of the Tagus River, and enjoyed prolonged views of a singing **Hawfinch**. We completed our stay at the extraordinary Peña Falcon viewpoint, watching a hundred **Griffon Vultures**, probably more, soaring over the cliffs, accompanied by some **Black Vultures** and a **Peregrine**.

We moved onward to Trujillo, making another geology stop at the Arroyo de la Vid , then crossing a vast *dehesa* landscape before dropping into the main square of Trujillo to get a first impression of this beautiful historic town, as **White Storks** watched us from their nests and **Crag Martins** rested on the stonework of the building.

8th February 2023: Sierra Brava Reservoir, Vegas Altas, Puerto Peña, Campo Lugar plains.

It was an overcast morning, with a few spots of rain, before a very fresh NE wind picked up. It was quite biting cold, but at least the clouds started to clear during the afternoon, affording us some beautiful light and shadow effects over the landscape.



We started beside the Sierra Brava reservoir, where a female and two male **Marsh Harriers** were clearly getting into the rites of spring. Wintering **Common Cranes** were spread over the rocky pastures. We descended to cross the rice fields near Casas del Hitos, where more **Common Cranes** were present, before passing through Madrigalejo and then onto the irrigated farmland behind the village of Vegas Altas. Here we had a nice small selection of waders to look at, including a pretty party of **Kentish Plovers**. There was a small group of

Glossy Ibis, which mysteriously disappeared into the stubble and we enjoyed excellent views of several **Water Pipits**.

After a very welcome coffee, we explored other areas of arable land before driving onto the rocky gorge of Puerto Peña. On the way we saw two **Black-winged Kites**, including one hovering beside the road. At the gorge, with the Guadiana River below us and a vast rock-face in front of us we had our picnic whilst watching circling **Griffon Vultures**, which were joined for a few minutes by a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles**.

After lunch we made a stop beside the Orellana Reservoir. It was rather quiet, but it was nice to see the first Sand Crocuses in flower. We returned to explore the area to the edge of Sierra Brava Reservoir, but soon elected to check the plains of Campo Lugar, where we had a magnificent view of a male **Hen Harrier**. At our last stop, a **Little Bustard** flew up from beside the car and we were able to watch it land and merge into cover. On a stubble field we found a party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and watched them in excellent late afternoon light.

9th February 2023: Alange, Properina Reservoir and Roman Bridge Mérida.

There was a welcome return to clear blue skies and sunshine today, with little wind until the afternoon. We headed south-west, crossing countryside to Santa Cruz de la Sierra before joining the motorway towards Mérida. In the flat agricultural plain after Miajadas, groups of **Common Cranes** were feeding. We stopped beside the dam at Alange and enjoyed a lovely walk beside the vast reservoir there with rocky outcrops to our left. **Thekla Larks** foraged on our path and **Serins** sang. There were parties of **House Martins** and **Crag Martins**. A **Common Quail** was singing close to the path, remaining, as is usual, completely hidden despite its proximity. A little bit further on we came across a male **Black Wheatear** and it afforded us superb views. A female was present nearby.



After coffee, we returned to the motorway, seeing a **Short-toed Eagle** distantly as we drove, as well as some rather impoverished-looking Giant Orchids. North of Mérida is the reservoir of Prosperina, created by a Roman dam and a popular recreational area for the city dwellers. It was quieter today, although several people were out enjoying this picturesque spot. As well as people there were groups of **Barn Swallows** hawking insects, and dozens of **Common Chiffchaffs** feeding at the water's edge.

We completed the afternoon walking on the Roman Bridge, the longest extant one in the world. Here we had superb views of three **Purple Swamphen**, as well as a male **Little Bittern**. Some of the **Great Cormorants** were in full breeding dress. A **Common Snipe** bathed close to the riverbank: all in the centre of the capital city of Extremadura!

10th February 2023: Monfragüe rock paintings, Miravete Pass, Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid.



We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo under clear blue skies but a biting north-easterly wind. Our first stop was below the castle of Monfragüe where we met with our guide Martin for a visit to see the rock paintings in a small cave. Here Martin provided an excellent explanation of the three cultures of art, spanning 6000 years, a remarkable overlay of painting styles and ideas.

As we left **Griffon Vultures** were soaring overhead and indeed by the cave entrance we found a Griffon Vulture's pellet, fallen sticks from nests as well as spraint from a Beech Marten.

We stopped near the Miravete Pass to enjoy lovely views of a party of **Woodlark** and we saw more at the pass itself, although we did not dally there very long because of the windy conditions. A descent for a good cup of coffee was more tempting!

Our final stop was at the Arrocampo Reservoir. The wind made finding birds very hard indeed, but we had good views of roosting **Black-crowned Night Herons**, several Purple Swamphen

and as well as distant egrets. A field full of **Common Cranes** was a fitting bonus for the week and just before we reached the motorway for Madrid we saw a pair of **Black-winged Kites**, they also sheltering from the wind on the leeward side of a small tree.

Arriving in Madrid at about 16.00, **Monk Parakeets** greeted our arrival in the metropolis.

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN

Whilst the drought last year and resultant huge reduction in rice cultivation lowered the diversity and numbers of some wintering birds, and high winds in the latter part of the week made finding small birds very challenging, we saw all the “Extremadura” specialities well.

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: Small migrating groups seen on two days.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Pairs seen on several water bodies.
3. **Wigeon**: One present at Campo Lugar pools and several hundred at Alcollarín.
4. **Gadwall**: Small numbers on pools on plains and at Alcollarín.
5. **Teal**: Seen on pools on the plains and at Alcollarín.
6. **Mallard**: Seen almost every day.
7. **Shoveler**: Seen almost every day and several hundred at Alcollarín.
8. **Tufted Duck**: A male on pool near Zorita on 5th February.
9. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on three days.
10. **Common Quail**: One calling at Alange on 9th February.
11. **Little Grebe**: Seen almost every day.
12. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín and Alange.
13. **Black-necked Grebe**: Three at Alcollarín on 6th February.
14. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost every day.
15. **Little Bittern**: A male from Roman Bridge, Mérida on 9th February.
16. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: over ten at roost at Arrocampo on 10th February.
17. **Cattle Egret**: Seen almost daily, with large numbers near Mérida and Arrocampo.
18. **Little Egret**: Seen on three days.
19. **Great White Egret**: Single figures seen on four days.
20. **Grey Heron**: Seen most days.
21. **Black Stork**: One adult at Monfragüe on 7th February.
22. **White Stork**: Seen every day.
23. **Glossy Ibis**: A party on rice fields on 8th February and one at Alange on 9th.
24. **Spoonbill**: Seen at Campo Lugar pools and Alcollarín.
25. **Egyptian Vulture**: An immature on plains on 4th February.
26. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen daily.
27. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
28. **Short-toed Eagle**: One at Alange on 9th February.
29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Two juveniles seen on the plain son 4th February and a pair at Monfragüe on 7th.
30. **Golden Eagle**: Seen only by Martin on arrival in Monfragüe.
31. **Bonelli's Eagle**: A pair at Puerto Peña on 8th February.
32. **Black Kite**: One at Campo Lugar on 4th February.
33. **Red Kite**: Seen every day.
34. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost every day.
35. **Hen Harrier**: Males seen on three days.

36. **Common Buzzard**: Seen almost every day.
37. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen on two days.
38. **Black-winged Kite**: One near Madrigalejo on 6th February, two south of Vegas Altas on 8th and two near Arrocampo on 10th.
39. **Common Kestrel**: Seen almost every day.
40. **Peregrine Falcon**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains and in Monfragüe.
41. **Water Rail**: Heard near Madrigalejo.
42. **Moorhen**: Seen on two last days.
43. **Purple Swamphen**: Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
44. **Common Coot**: Seen on most large water bodies.
45. **Common Crane**: Seen on all but one day.
46. **Little Bustard**: A party of about 40 on plains on 4th February, 9 at Campo Lugar on 6th and one there on 8th.
47. **Great Bustard**: 55 at least on plains on 4th February.
48. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on small pools on two occasions and on rice fields.
49. **Stone Curlew**: 24 near Campo Lugar village on 5th February.
50. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen on rice fields.
51. **Ringed Plover**: Small numbers on rice fields.
52. **Kentish Plover**: 12 near Vegas Altas on 8th February.
53. **Golden Plover**: Flocks seen on several occasions on open habitat.
54. **Northern Lapwing**: Seen every day.
55. **Dunlin**: About 30 seen at Vegas Altas.
56. **Ruff**: Single figures near Palazuelo on rice fields.
57. **Common Snipe**: Seen on four days.
58. **Black-tailed Godwit**: Single figures on rice fields.
59. **Spotted Redshank**: Small parties on rice fields.
60. **Greenshank**: Seen on plains and near Palazuelo.
61. **Green Sandpiper**: Seen on plains and rice fields, especially along canals.
62. **Common Sandpiper**: Seen on four days.
63. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen most days.
64. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen almost daily.
65. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen at Campo Lugar plains on 5th and 8th February.
66. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Large party of about 80 seen on plains on 4th February.
67. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon**: Seen daily.
68. **Stock Dove**: Recorded on two days.
69. **Woodpigeon**: Seen daily.
70. **Collared Dove**: Seen daily.
71. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: Heard near Madrigalejo, and seen briefly near Campo Lugar on 6th February.
72. **Eagle Owl**: One seen at Monfragüe on 7th February.
73. **Little Owl**: Seen or heard almost daily.
74. **Kingfisher**: Seen on four days.
75. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
76. **Wryneck**: One at Madrigalejo on 6th February.
77. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen on two days.
78. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Heard at Pago de San Clemente on 9th February.
79. **Monk Parakeet**: Seen on entry to Madrid.
80. **Calandra Lark**: Seen most days and especially common on the plains.

81. **Crested Lark**: Seen daily.
82. **Thekla Lark**: Seen most days.
83. **Woodlark**: Two small parties seen very well at Miravete on 10th February.
84. **Skylark**: Seen on plains and rice fields.
85. **Crag Martin**: Seen almost every day.
86. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
87. **House Martin**: Seen most days.
88. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen almost daily.
89. **Water Pipit**: Seen on rice fields at Vegas Altas on 8th February.
90. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen on four days.
91. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
92. **Wren**: Seen most days.
93. **Dipper**: Pair on River Ruercas near Cañamero on 5th February.
94. **Duncock**: Heard near Cañamero on 5th February.
95. **Robin**: Seen daily.
96. **Bluethroat**: One near Palazuelo on 6th February and one near Sierra Brava on 8th.
97. **Black Redstart**: Seen almost daily.
98. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
99. **Black Wheatear**: Pair at Alange on 9th February.
100. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen on several days.
101. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
102. **Song Thrush**: Seen daily.
103. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on 8th February.
104. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded on two days.
105. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen most days.
106. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen on four days.
107. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen most days.
108. **Blackcap**: Seen almost every day.
109. **Common Chiffchaff**: Seen daily.
110. **Firecrest**: Recorded on three days.
111. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on two days.
112. **Blue Tit**: Seen most days.
113. **Great Tit**: Seen daily.
114. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Seen on two days.
115. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen almost daily.
116. **Jay**: Recorded on four days.
117. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
118. **Common Magpie**: Seen daily.
119. **Jackdaw**: Seen most days.
120. **Raven**: Seen most days.
121. **Common Starling**: Seen on three days.
122. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
123. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
124. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen most days.
125. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on rice fields.
126. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on rice fields at Vegas Altas.
127. **Chaffinch**: Seen daily.
128. **Serin**: Seen daily.

- 129. **Greenfinch:** Seen on three days.
- 130. **Goldfinch:** Seen on several days.
- 131. **Siskin:** Seen at River Ruercas and Alange.
- 132. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
- 133. **Hawfinch:** Seen almost daily.
- 134. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

Other notable wildlife

Mammals

Rabbit

Iberian Hare

Red Deer

Butterflies

Western Dappled White

Small heath

Speckled Wood