

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



TUB EXTREMADURA WITH DAVID LINDO

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

5th – 11th November 2023



Itinerary

5th November 2023: Pick-up at Madrid airport.

6th November 2023: Walk at Pago de San Clemente and Alcollarín Reservoir.

7th November 2023: Plains between Cáceres and Trujillo

8th November 2023: Sierra Brava reservoir, Madrigalejo and Palazuelo rice fields

9th November 2023: Hornachos area, Roman Bridge Mérida and Esparragalejo

10th November 2023: Monfragüe National Park

11th November 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

5th November 2023: Pick-up at Madrid airport.

David and Martin met the group at 13.30 at Terminal 1 and we headed straightaway onto the southern ring road of Madrid and then onwards on the motorway for Extremadura. It was a bag of mixed weather, some sunshine, cloud, a few showers and some wind, vestiges of the storm that had been hitting the region the previous few days. We stopped for our sandwiches at a service station an hour from the airport and the very first birds we stopped to look at were two sub-adult **Spanish Imperial Eagles**. We had amazing views of them as they passed several times low overhead, as well performing some courtship display: sky-dancing.

Along the journey we also saw **White Stork**, as well as both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**.

We arrived at Casa Rural El 17.30, welcomed by Claudia.

6th November 2023: Walk at Pago de San Clemente and Alcollarín Reservoir.

After breakfast, David led a walk along the lanes around the village, giving an opportunity to get acquainted with birds such as **Iberian Magpie**, **Spotless Starlings**, **Spanish Sparrows** and **Serins**.



The rest of the day was spent at Alcollarín Reservoir, 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** and **Red-crested Pochard**, hundreds of **Shoveler**, as well as three species of grebe. We saw at least four, perhaps six, Black Storks and a party of Spoonbills. Birds of prey included **Merlin**, **Marsh Harrier** and both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**. Small birds were also enjoyed such as **Dartford Warbler**, lots of **Common Chiffchaffs**, **Kingfishers** and **White Wagtails**.

There was a tremendous display of autumn flowers, especially **Serotine Narcissus** and **Autumn Snowflake**. And we had an excellent view of an adult **Horseshoe Whip Snake** on the track.



7th November 2023: Plains between Cáceres and Trujillo

There was a crisp start to the day with ice on the windscreen and a fresh wind made it quite chilly for much of the day. 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 of several **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 found a flock of about 40 **Great Bustard**. **Black bellied Sandgrouse** were seen in flight. During the morning we had superb views of vultures on the ground, both **Griffon** and **Black**, offering an excellent opportunity to compare their size. A large flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** were seen on the ground and all around us were larks: **Calandras**, **Crested**, **Thekla** and **Skylark**.

Just south of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca we were treated to an extraordinary show of birds of prey with three **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, a **Sparrowhawk**, about a dozen **Red Kite** as well as both vultures.

After an excellent coffee break in the village we stopped beside the Magasca River briefly where there was a spectacular show of **Autumn Buttercup**.

Back on the plains we found a large mixed flock of **Greenfinches** and **Rock Sparrows**. After our picnic we continued along the plains, having an excellent view of a perched female **Merlin** and a juvenile **Goshawk** which crossed the road in front of us.

We walked a section of an ancient drovers' trail and saw a flock of about 30 **Little Bustard** and huge but distant flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. Two **Great Bustards** were seen in flight. As we headed back to Trujillo, after seeing a male **Merlin**, we saw yet another Merlin in flight (a further bird as we left Trujillo later gave us an amazing total of four).

We stopped in the main square of Trujillo to admire the wonderful historic centre of the town, enjoy some afternoon beverages and watch a flock of **White Storks** circling the town.

8th November 2023: Sierra Brava reservoir, Madrigalejo and Palazuelo rice fields

It was a much milder day, with some patches of fog on the journey southwards, but afterwards we enjoyed generally sunny or only lightly overcast conditions. South of Zorita we crossed the plains and then stopped beside the Sierra Brava Reservoir, there was little on the water itself, but we did have a nice view of a **Blue Rock Thrush** near the dam. From there we crossed the rice fields near Madrigalejo, seeing a **Black-winged Kite** and having a lovely view of a **Wryneck** beside the road. Beside a small flooded gravel pit, **Cetti's Warblers** were singing.

Just north of Madrigalejo we looked in vain for Stone Curlew but did see a couple of **Barn Swallows** and had superb views of **Iberian Magpies**. We then explored the rice fields north of the village of Vegas Altas, having excellent views of two male **Hen Harrier** and our first views (in flight) of a small group of **Common Crane**.

After coffee in the village we continued crossing the arable land nearby, finding a flock of about 30 **Great Bustard**, giving us rather good views.

We stopped for lunch beside the Ruercas River, seeing a **Wryneck** briefly, four **Mandarin Duck** (very unusual in Extremadura) and hordes of **Chiffchaff** and **Common Waxbills**. A small group of **Siskin** feeding on old sunflowers was delightful.



The afternoon was spent on the rice fields near Palazuelo. As well as another **Black-winged Kite** and **Hen Harrier**, we had an excellent spread of waders, including **Avocet**, **Ruff**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Spotted Redshank** and **Little Stint**. But most impressive was a huge group (over 500) of **Glossy Ibis**.



On our return back to base, we stopped near the village of Campo Lugar and saw two roosting **Stone Curlew**.

9th November 2023: Hornachos area, Roman Bridge Mérida and Esparragalejo

It had rained heavily during the night and we drove south-west from base, with a beautiful and atmospheric morning of patches of fog and mist and a beautiful dawn light. As we headed off the motorway, we saw no fewer than three **Black-winged Kites** perched on telegraph posts beside the road. As we crossed the Guadiana we saw a couple of **Alpine Swifts** pass over the road.

After a short stop to stretch our legs beside a small village we continued to the village of Hornachos. We had a superb walk on a path overlooking the town, with the Sierra Grande crowned with its Moorish castle to our right. We had good views of five **Black Wheatears**, as well as **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Rock Bunting**, **Black Redstart** and several **Thekla Larks**.



After coffee, we went to a viewpoint overlooking the Matachel river. This was a raptor paradise with perhaps no fewer than five **Spanish Imperial Eagles** seen, as well as **Red Kite** and **Griffon Vultures**. **Dartford Warblers** called from the vegetation beside the picnic area, and **Iberian Green Woodpeckers** from further afield.



We paused for a few minutes north of Hornachos, where we saw another pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** and a **Sparrowhawk**, before driving north-west to the city of Mérida. We had an afternoon walk on the Roman Bridge, the longest in the world, crossing the River Guadiana in the centre of Mérida. Two **Western Swamphens** were seen, as well as a **Hawfinch**, and several **Hoopoes** in the park. A **Red-rumped Swallow** was a nice surprise.

We made a quick visit to the pool at Esparragalejo, but there were few birds with the water level very high.

10th November 2023: Monfragüe National Park

We enjoyed a dry day today, with plenty of sunshine during most of the day until mid-afternoon when it clouded over.

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 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**, a **Peregrine**, a **Firecrest** and at least a hundred **Crag Martins** resting on the sun-lit cliff-face.

After a short walk beside the River Tagus, where we could see a nest of a **Black Vulture**, we stopped for coffee at the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos.

We then headed to the northern edge of the park, stopping at the attractive Portilla del Tiétar gorge. Here we had excellent views of perched **Black** and **Griffon Vulture**. A **Sparrowhawk** harassed the **Crag Martins** and we saw another **Firecrest**. A **Peregrine** was also seen there.

Returning through the park, we stopped at a belt of pines and then had our picnic at the Tajadilla picnic area. Interestingly a juvenile **Griffon Vulture** was still on a nest being fed by its parents. A **Golden Eagle** flew directly overhead, giving us quite a prolonged view.

We then followed the road towards Plasencia and a **Bonelli's Eagle** was spotted as we approached the Puerto de Serrana viewpoint. There we were able to enjoy a prolonged view of this stunning eagle, in superb light.



We completed our visit back at the Salto de Gitano, watching both **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** flying past at low altitude.

After a short walk late afternoon beside the River Almonte, we returned for our last evening at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.



11th November 2023: Arrocampo Reservoir and return to Madrid

It was a mild but overcast morning as we bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and headed north-east on the motorway towards the reservoir of Arrocampo, beside the village of Saucedilla.

The wind had picked up when we arrived, making searching for small birds in the reedbeds very difficult. But we quickly found a male **Little Bittern** (and heard several others) as well as two **Western Swamphens**. A **Squacco Heron** was seen in flight. We managed to get a brief view of a **Bearded Tit** and heard **Penduline Tits** too. There were simply masses of **Common Chiffchaffs**, as well as groups of **White Wagtails** and Meadow Pipits. Overhead we saw a few **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**, whilst **Marsh Harriers** cruised over the reeds.

Just before completing our visit, we found a female **Violet Dropwing** dragonfly.

By late morning it was time to repair for a coffee and then pack the van for the onward journey to the airport. Seeing busy traffic again on the Madrid ring road was a shock to the system after the almost traffic-free roads of Extremadura, but we made it on time to the airport where the group dispersed to continue their separate journeys home.

LIST OF BIRD SPECIES SEEN

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on three days.
2. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Alcollarín.
3. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín.
4. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín and Sierra Brava.

5. **Teal:** Seen on three days.
6. **Mallard:** Seen on most days.
7. **Pintail:** Seen at Alcollarín.
8. **Northern Shoveler:** Seen on three days.
9. **Red-crested Pochard:** Seen at Alcollarín.
10. **Common Pochard:** Seen near Zorita.
11. **Mandarin Duck:** Four seen on Ruercas River.
12. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen near Hornachos.
13. **Little Grebe:** Seen on most days.
14. **Great Crested Grebe:** Large numbers at Alcollarín, also on two other days.
15. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín.
16. **Great Cormorant:** Seen most days.
17. **Little Bittern:** Seen at Arrocampo.
18. **Squacco Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo.
19. **Cattle Egret:** Seen most days.
20. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
21. **Great Egret:** Seen most days.
22. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
23. **Black Stork:** Seen at Alcollarín.
24. **White Stork:** Seen most days.
25. **Glossy Ibis:** Big flock on the rice fields.
26. **Spoonbill:** Seen on two days.
27. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen every day.
28. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
29. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen on three days, superb numbers and views!
30. **Golden Eagle:** One seen in Monfragüe.
31. **Bonelli's Eagle:** One seen in Monfragüe.
32. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
33. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
34. **Hen Harrier:** Males seen on the rice fields.
35. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost daily.
36. **Goshawk:** A juvenile seen on the plains.
37. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on four days.
38. **Black-winged Kite:** Two seen on the rice fields and three seen near Valverde de Mérida.
39. **Common Kestrel:** Seen most days.
40. **Merlin:** Seen on two days.
41. **Peregrine:** Seen at Monfragüe.
42. **Water Rail:** Heard on three days.
43. **Moorhen:** Heard at Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
44. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
45. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Mérida.
46. **Little Bustard:** 30 seen on plains north of Trujillo.
47. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains east of Cáceres, north of Trujillo and near the rice fields.
48. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on the rice fields.
49. **Avocet:** Two on the rice fields.
50. **Stone Curlew:** Two seen near Campo Lugar.

51. **Golden Plover:** A small party on the plains north of Trujillo.
52. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen almost daily.
53. **Dunlin:** Seen on the rice fields.
54. **Little Stint:** One seen on the rice fields.
55. **Ruff:** Seen on rice fields.
56. **Common Snipe:** Seen on the plains.
57. **Black-tailed Godwit:** One seen on the rice fields.
58. **Spotted Redshank:** One seen on the rice fields.
59. **Greenshank:** Seen on three days.
60. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen most days.
61. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen on four days.
62. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen most days.
63. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen at Alcollarín and rice fields.
64. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
65. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen north of Trujillo and east of Cáceres.
66. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
67. **Woodpigeon:** Seen almost daily.
68. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
69. **Little Owl:** Seen on two days.
70. **Alpine Swift:** Seen near Valverde de Mérida.
71. **Kingfisher:** Seen on most days.
72. **Monk Parakeet:** Seen in Madrid.
73. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost daily.
74. **Wryneck:** Seen on rice fields.
75. **Iberian Green Woodpecker:** Heard near Hornachos.
76. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
77. **Crested Lark:** Seen most days.
78. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
79. **Woodlark:** Seen on one day.
80. **Skylark:** Seen on two days.
81. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost days.
82. **Barn Swallow:** Seen on two days
83. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen at Monfragüe and Mérida.
84. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen on several days.
85. **Water Pipit:** Seen on the rice fields.
86. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on four days.
87. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
88. **Wren:** Seen on several days.
89. **Robin:** Seen daily.
90. **Bluethroat:** Seen on the rice fields.
91. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
92. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
93. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Hornachos.
94. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen on three days.
95. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
96. **Song Thrush:** Seen on two days.
97. **Cetti's Warbler:** Heard on several days.
98. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen on most days.

99. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on three days.
100. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
101. **Blackcap:** Seen every day.
102. **Chiffchaff:** Seen almost daily.
103. **Firecrest:** Seen in Monfragüe.
104. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
105. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
106. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
107. **Bearded Tit:** Seen at Arrocampo.
108. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen at Hornachos.
109. **Penduline Tit:** Heard at Arrocampo.
110. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
111. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
112. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
113. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
114. **Raven:** Seen daily.
115. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
116. **Common Starling:** Seen on plains east of Cáceres.
117. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
118. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on three days.
119. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on two days.
120. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields.
121. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields.
122. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
123. **Serin:** Seen on three days.
124. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
125. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
126. **Linnet:** Seen on three days.
127. **Siskin:** Seen on two days.
128. **Hawfinch:** Seen on two days.
129. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Hornachos.
130. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.

Other Wildlife of Note

Butterflies

Bath White

Small White

Clouded Yellow

Red Admiral

Speckled Wood

Holly Blue

Long-tailed Blue

Dragonflies

Iberian Blue-tail Damselfly

Red-veined Darter

Violet Dropwing

Reptiles

Spanish Terrapin

Red-eared Terrapin

Horseshoe Whip Snake

Mammals

Red Deer

Rabbit

Autumn flowers

Sea Squill

Autumn Buttercup

Autumn Snowflake

Serotine Narcissus