

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



LATE AUTUMN IN EXTREMADURA FOR LAWRENCE AND VERONICA

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

10th – 17th November 2024



The Dolmen of Lácara

Itinerary

10th November 2024: Collection from Madrid and drive to Extremadura

11th November 2024: Villuercas Mountains

12th November 2024: Caparra, La Garganta and Monfragüe

13th November 2024: Plains north of Trujillo and east of Cáceres, Sierra de Fuentes.

14th November 2024: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir

15th November 2024: Arrocampo, Roman temple Valdecañas, Belvis de Monroy

16th November 2024: Montánchez Castle, Santa Lucia de Trampal, Dolmen of Lácara, Roman Bridge of Mérida

17th November 2024: Return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

10th November 2024: Collection from Madrid and drive to Extremadura

Martin met with Lawrence and Veronica at about 14.15 at Madrid airport and we were quickly heading out around the southern ring-road. Being a Sunday afternoon, the traffic was not particularly heavy, so we made excellent progress. It was very light once we were on the motorway for Extremadura and we made the journey without needing to stop en route. Birds seen on the way included **Red Kite** and numerous **Spotless Starlings**.

Claudia greeted our arrival at Casa Rural El Recuerdo and an evening meal was quickly prepared.

11th November 2024: Villuercas Mountains

It was a mild, sunny morning with hardly a breath of wind. We set off southwards, passing through Zorita and onwards to Logrosán and Cañamero. The *dehesa* landscape was a delight with emerald-green pasture and the darker hues of the holm oaks. As we approached Cañamero, the southern flank of the Villuercas Mountains was visible, with deciduous oaks and impressive rocky outcrops. We stopped beside the Ruercas river as it ran through an impressive quartzite gorge. We enjoyed a lovely walk along the riverine woodland and small holdings seeing a good array of species, including numerous **Common Chiffchaffs** and some very smart **Common Waxbills**.



Common Waxbill

We then continued to Guadalupe where we had coffee in the square. **Crag Martins** flew around the towers of the basilica.

From there we moved towards the highest point of the Villuercas Range, stopping first of all at the head of the Ibor river, with the wonderful autumnal colours of the sweet chestnuts and Pyrenean oak. Higher up, we paused to visit the snow well and admire the Vieja valley. **Dartford Warblers** called from the scrub beside us.

At the peak of the Villuercas Mountains, the views were simply breathtaking in every direction, but especially northwards across the expanse of the folds of the Appalachian Relief. A **Blue Rock Thrush** was seen, several **Black Redstarts** and very briefly two **Alpine Accentors** in flight. All the time **Griffon Vultures** passed overhead.

We descended beside the impressive scree slopes of the head of the Almonte River and then along the valley to stop at the Almonte gorge. Here there were more **Griffon Vultures** and a distant **Bonelli's Eagle**. From there we completed our day with a shopping trip to Trujillo before returning to Casa Rural El Recuerdo at the end of the afternoon.



From the Pico de Villuercas

12th November 2024: Caparra, La Garganta and Monfragüe

It was a day of clear skies and sunshine, but in exposed situations a fresh north-easterly wind made it feel quite chilly! We explored today the extreme north of Extremadura, driving through vast expanses of *dehesa* landscape, looking superb at this time of year, to reach the Roman site of Caparra. Here we visited the interpretation centre and then the ruins itself, seeing the

amphitheatre, a villa, the baths, the forum and most magnificently, the arch over the Via de la Plata. It was a lovely setting, with the backdrop of the mountains. **Common Cranes** were calling as we wandered across the site, and we saw **Thekla Lark** and **Black Redstart**, amongst other species.



Cáparra

After coffee, we ascended to the town of La Garganta and beyond, stopping just short of the border with Castille y Leon. Unfortunately, the wind was fierce making it difficult to find birds, despite a short walk to look for places more sheltered. We had lunch beside the old wolf trap and then visited the very impressive snow well. Just as we were about to leave, we heard **Crested Tits** calling. We entered the wood to gain a bit of shelter and then were rewarded with views of several **Crested Tits**, **Coal Tit**, **Firecrest** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**.

We returned southwards, making a stop at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint in the Monfragüe National Park. It was a perfect afternoon, we were sheltered from the wind, the light was superb and the **Griffon Vultures** were wheeling above us. We also saw a **Peregrine**, several **Black Vultures**, as well as smaller birds like **Black Redstart**, **Crag Martin** and **Common Chiffchaff**.

13th November 2024: Plains north of Trujillo and east of Cáceres, Sierra de Fuentes.

There was a very fresh easterly wind throughout the day which made it feel very cold and presented considerable challenges for the birding today. By mid-afternoon, it had also clouded over and there were heavy showers of rain.

We started on the plains north of Trujillo, seeing **Rock Sparrows**, **Spanish Sparrows** and **Thekla Larks** as we drove. We stopped at the drovers' trail of Cañada Real de Puente Mocha. Here we took a walk, battling against the wind, but were rewarded by views of **Little Bustard** and **Pintailed Sandgrouse** in flight. We returned to Trujillo for coffee, and then travelled westwards in the direction of Cáceres. Stopping at about ten kilometres east of the city we entered the plains again. Because of the wind we opted to seek shelter in a birding hide. There we spent a very productive 90 minutes. A group of **Great Bustards** appeared on the open fields. A **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was watched flying and then perched. There was a very fine male **Marsh Harrier** and also a beautiful **Red Kite** which flew low to the ground against the strong head wind. A group of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** were watched foraging on the ground. There was an interesting mixed flock of **Common** and **Spotless Starlings**.



Little Bustards

From there, after our picnic, we drove a further kilometre or so along the track. We were rewarded by a small group of **Little Bustard** that flew almost overhead, as well as a flock of **Pintailed Sandgrouse** and more **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. Most memorably we also watched a huge flock of perhaps 500 **Calandra Larks**, flying low over the ground, perhaps disturbed by a **Merlin** which sped through like a bullet.

We completed the afternoon at some small pools beside the town of Sierra de Fuentes. Here there were a selection of waders, such as **Black-winged Stilt**, **Black-tailed Godwit** and **Common Snipe**, a good number of **Little Grebe**, a **Great Crested Grebe** and a flotilla of Common Coot. By now the sky had darkened considerably and our return to base was mainly in heavy rain.

14th November 2024: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir



Common Cranes

It was a heavily overcast day, but it remained mainly dry and the wind was lighter than previously. We explored the area south of Zorita, stopping on the plains near Campo Lugar to have a lovely view of a **Little Owl**. We then entered the rice-growing area near Madrigalejo, seeing large flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** erupting from the fields of rice and scores of **Common Cranes**. After coffee, we moved to the rice fields near Palazuelo. Here a solitary adult **Greater Flamingo** was a surprise. We were rewarded by huge flocks of **Common Cranes** and **Glossy Ibis**.



Greater Flamingo

At two places we watched tractors ploughing in the rice stubble, accompanied by hundreds of egrets and gulls. We saw five rather stunning **Yellow Wagtails**. Waders including some smart-looking **Kentish Plovers**. **Marsh Harriers** were the common bird of prey and sightings included some very fine males.

From the rice fields we moved to the Alcollarín Reservoir, where despite the rather gloomy dull light, we had good views of several duck species present, including many **Wigeon**, some **Spoonbill** and two **Black Stork**.

Returning to Madrigalejo via the plains of Campo Lugar where we saw a single **Great Bustard**, a **Merlin** out hunting and two **Little Owls**, we stopped to watch **Stone Curlews** at their roost near an old railway station.

15th November 2024: Arrocampo, Roman temple Valdecañas, Belvis de Monroy

There was a fresh easterly wind, but as we opted to spend the first part of the morning in the shelter of one of the hides at the Arrocampo Reservoir, we stayed comfortable. Despite the weather, which made looking for small birds in the reeds very difficult, we had a remarkably successful 90 minutes or so. The highlight was the **Eurasian Bittern**, which having disappeared quickly in the reeds (seen only by Martin), came out to give us a flyover just as we were settled inside the car to leave. We also enjoyed excellent views of **Purple Swamphen**, as well as **Marsh Harriers**. A **Squacco Heron**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Water Pipit** were seen more briefly.



Great Bittern

After coffee, we drove around the western side of the area, stopping at the pool of Cerro Alto, where there were large numbers of **Common Snipe** and also a **Little Ringed Plover** and **Common Sandpiper**.

We then drove to the edge of the Valdecañas Reservoir, to have our picnic beside the Roman temple structure there, which had been rescued from the flooding of the reservoir. There were many **Grey Lag Geese** feeding on the shore of the reservoir, with a **Barnacle Goose** amongst

them. We completed the afternoon with a visit to the fine medieval castle at Belvis de Monroy, where **Crag Martins**, a **Barn Swallow** and a **Red-rumped Swallow** flew and a **Blue Rock Thrush** was seen briefly.

16th November 2024: Montánchez Castle, Santa Lucia de Trampal, Dolmen of Lácara, Roman Bridge of Mérida

Today, on a day that started overcast and with light rain but quickly developed to warm sunshine, we took a circuit of cultures (with some birds thrown in!). We started to the west of Trujillo at the mountain town of Montánchez, to visit the imposing castle that looks over the tightly-knit town. The castle has a Moorish origin and then became strategically important for the Reconquest. The views were outstanding and the information given first rate. We found three **Alpine Accentor**, the castle being a traditional wintering site for the species. **Crag Martins** flittered overhead and we also had good views of a **Black Redstart**. From there we stopped at the next town, Alcuéscar, to visit the Visigoth church of Santa Lucia de Trampal. This is the southernmost of the few remaining Visigoth churches in Spain, set in a beautiful olive grove.



The Visigoth Church at Alcuéscar

We then stopped for coffee in a busy bar before proceeding southwest to the Dolmen of Lácara. We had our picnic in a beautiful *dehesa* landscape and then walked the fifteen or so minutes to the dolmen itself. It was a hugely impressive structure, with massive megaliths. The

dehesa was full of wintering **Common Chiffchaff** and also a couple of **Firecrests**, whilst overhead cruised **Red Kite**, **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**.

It was then just a short drive south to Mérida where we completed the afternoon walking on the Roman Bridge. We had superb views of a **Little Bittern**, roosting **Black-crowned Night-Herons** and **Glossy Ibis**, whilst in the nearby parkland there were small flocks of **Common Waxbills**.

17th November 2024: Return to Madrid

We set off at 09.45 from Casa Rural El Recuerdo, making a brief stop to reacquaint ourselves with the beautiful main square of Trujillo on a quite Sunday morning. **Crag Martins** assembled on the façade of one of the 16th century buildings. It was then a clear run through to Madrid airport. The sky was hazy, but the Gredos Mountains were clear to the north of us. **White Storks**, **Common Cranes**, **Red Kites** and **Black Vultures** were highlights of the journey back.

LIST OF BIRDS SEEN

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: A large flock at Valdecañas.
2. **Barnacle Goose**: One with the Greylags at Valdecañas.
3. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on three days.
4. **Eurasian Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín.
5. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín.
6. **Eurasian Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
7. **Pintail**: Seen at Arrocampo.
8. **Mallard**: Seen on three days.
9. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín.
10. **Little Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín.
11. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín
12. **Great Cormorant**: Seen most days.
13. **Great Bittern**: Seen at Arrocampo.
14. **Little Bittern**: Seen in Mérida.
15. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Roosting birds seen in Mérida.
16. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on two days.
17. **Little Egret**: Seen most days.
18. **Great Egret**: Seen on two days.
19. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost every day.
20. **Black Stork**: Two seen at Alcollarín.
21. **White Stork**: Seen almost every day.
22. **Glossy Ibis**: Seen on the rice fields and Mérida.
23. **Spoonbill**: Seen on the rice fields and Alcollarín Reservoir.
24. **Greater Flamingo**: Seen on the rice fields.
25. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen every day.
26. **Black Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Seen on the plains east of Cáceres.
28. **Bonelli's Eagle**: One seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
29. **Red Kite**: Seen every day.
30. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen most days.
31. **Common Buzzard**: Seen almost every day.

32. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost every day.
33. **Merlin:** Seen on two days on the plains.
34. **Peregrine Falcon:** One seen at Monfragüe.
35. **Water Rail:** One heard in rice fields.
36. **Moorhen:** Seen at Mérida
37. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
38. **Common Coot:** Seen on two days.
39. **Common Crane:** Seen almost every day.
40. **Little Bustard:** Two groups seen on the plains.
41. **Great Bustard:** A group seen on the plains east of Cáceres and one near Campo Lugar.
42. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on two days.
43. **Stone Curlew:** A roosting flock seen near Madrigalejo.
44. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Arrocampo.
45. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
46. **Golden Plover:** Two seen on the rice fields.
47. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen every day.
48. **Dunlin:** Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.
49. **Common Snipe:** Seen on three days.
50. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Seen at Sierra de Fuentes.
51. **Spotted Redshank:** Seen on rice fields.
52. **Wood Sandpiper:** Seen on the rice fields.
53. **Greenshank:** Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.
54. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on the rice fields.
55. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Arrocampo.
56. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on three days.
57. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on four days.
58. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains between Trujillo and Cáceres.
59. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains between Trujillo and Cáceres.
60. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
61. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen most days.
62. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
63. **Little Owl:** Seen on Campo Lugar plains.
64. **Kingfisher:** Seen at Arrocampo.
65. **Hoopoe:** Seen every day.
66. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
67. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost every day.
68. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
69. **Skylark:** Seen on the plains.
70. **Crag Martin:** Seen every day.
71. **Barn Swallow:** Seen on two days.
72. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen on two days.
73. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
74. **Water Pipit:** Seen on the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
75. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on two days.
76. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields.
77. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
78. **Wren:** Seen on one day.
79. **Dunnock:** Heard in the Villuercas.

80. **Alpine Accentor:** Seen in the Villuercas and at Montánchez.
81. **Robin:** Seen almost daily.
82. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
83. **Stonechat:** Seen almost daily.
84. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen in the Villuercas Mountains and Belvis de Monroy.
85. **Blackbird:** Seen almost daily.
86. **Song Thrush:** Seen most days.
87. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded most days.
88. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen at Arrocampo.
89. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on two days.
90. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen on three days.
91. **Blackcap:** Seen most days.
92. **Common Chiffchaff:** Recorded every day.
93. **Firecrest:** Seen on three days.
94. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
95. **Crested Tit:** Seen at La Garganta.
96. **Blue Tit:** Seen most days.
97. **Great Tit:** Seen most days.
98. **Coal Tit:** Seen at La Garganta.
99. **Nuthatch:** Heard in the Villuercas Mountains.
100. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen at La Garganta.
101. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
102. **Jay:** Seen on one day.
103. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
104. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
105. **Jackdaw:** Seen on most days.
106. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
107. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
108. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains.
109. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
110. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen on several days.
111. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
112. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen and on plains north of Trujillo.
113. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields.
114. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on three days.
115. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
116. **Serin:** Seen on several days.
117. **Greenfinch:** Seen on most days.
118. **Goldfinch:** Seen on most days.
119. **Eurasian Siskin:** Seen in the Villuercas Mountains.
120. **Linnet:** Seen on most days.
121. **Hawfinch:** Seen on two days.
122. **Reed Bunting:** Seen at Arrocampo.
123. **Corn Bunting:** Seen almost daily.