

# BIRDING EXTREMADURA



**WINTER HOLIDAY FOR ALISTAIR AND PENNY**

**Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura**

**22<sup>nd</sup> January – 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024**



## **Itinerary**

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport**

**23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024: Pago de San Clemente**

**24<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres**

**25<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Plains near Trujillo, Monfragüe National Park**

**26<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Madrigalejo and the rice fields, Puerto Peña and Alcollarín Reservoir**

**27<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Belén Plains, Villuercas Mountains, Berrocal of Trujillo**

**28<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Alange and Mérida**

**29<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Campo Lugar plains, Alcollarín Reservoir and Trujillo**

**30<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Arrocampo and transfer to Madrid**

## TRIP REPORT

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024: Pick-up at Madrid airport.**

Alistair and Penny arrived ahead of schedule at Terminal 4 of Madrid airport, but because of vehicle issues, we left in a hire car mid-afternoon. We headed off around the southern ring-road of Madrid under clear blue skies. Fresh snow lay on the Guadarrama Mountains to the north of the city and on the Gredos Mountains as we left the city. The traffic was quite light and soon we were out on the motorway heading to Extremadura. **Red Kites** and **White Storks** were the main birds seen on the journey, but as the sun set, there was the magical sight of lines of **Common Cranes** heading to roost. Reaching Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 19.30, with a chorus of **Natterjack toads** to greet us, we were welcomed by Claudia who had prepared a delicious evening meal.

**23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024: Pago de San Clemente**

It was a day of beautiful, almost spring-like weather which we spent exploring the local environs of the village. After breakfast and stopping to admire a **Stripeless Tree Frog** living in the *tinaja* standing in the courtyard, we walked for several kilometres on a track on the northern flank of the Sierra de los Lagares, affording fine views across to the Gredos Mountains and to Trujillo, standing proud atop of its granite batholith.



The landscape was predominantly olive orchards, small meadows and holm oak *dehesa*. The **White Storks** were back on the village church. We watched groups of **Spanish Sparrows**, **Iberian Magpies**, an **Iberian Grey Shrike** and a **Hoopoe**. Over thirty species were seen, including a majestic pair of **Black Vulture** as we returned to the house for a salad alfresco lunch.

A short walk in the afternoon took us past a line of cork oak trees and through more wooded habitat. **Blackcaps**, **Song Thrushes** and **Common Chiffchaff** were the winter visitors present.

#### 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres



ns

It was a day with real feeling of early spring, with warm sunshine and cloudless skies. We headed west from Trujillo, entering the vast plains, looking stunning with the yellow mantle of tall rocket in flower. We passed a row of nestboxes for Rollers, seeing a **Little Owl** and **Jackdaws**. Before our very first stop, we saw a **Great Bustard** flying high and as we stopped we saw a wonderful flock of **Great Bustards**, over 60 birds. Scanning in all directions we came across other small groups of these birds. **Black-winged Stilts** graced a small pond, and we started our study of larks with an obliging pair of **Crested Larks**. We needed to make a diversion to Cáceres to change the hire car, but once back on the plains, we were able to have good views of **Thekla** and **Calandra Larks** too. A **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** was seen on the ground and flocks of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** in flight.

We headed towards the village of Santa Marta de Magsaca, stopping for our picnic overlooking the Tamuja River. Here we had close flybys of **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** and several **Red Kites**. To the north of the village, beside the Magasca River, an adult **Golden Eagle** flew overhead. Back on the plains we enjoyed an afternoon walk on the drover's trail, seeing several **Green-striped White** and **Western Dappled White** butterflies. **Calandra Larks** sang overhead and there were flocks of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, **Golden Plover** and **Lapwing**.



We headed back towards Trujillo, stopping to admire the beautiful granite landscape of the *berrocal* and also making a stop to view the walled town from the western side, lit by the afternoon sun.



### 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Plains near Trujillo, Monfragüe National Park

It was another fabulous day in terms of the weather: warm and sunny with very little wind. We stopped first on the edge of the plains just west of Trujillo. Here we saw both **Black-bellied** and **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** in flight as well as large numbers of **Golden Plover** and **Lapwing**. **Calandra Larks** sang all around us. The highlight was undoubtedly an adult **Spanish Eagle** sitting on the top of a lone eucalyptus tree.

From there we drove through the huge expanse of *dehesa* north to the National Park of Monfragüe. Our first stop was a guided visit of the rock art, in a narrow cave below the castle. Here the art spanned 6000 years, the earliest nine and half thousand years old: Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age art.

We drove through the park and had our picnic in a belt of pines overlooking the Tiétar River, as **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** soared overhead. There were dozens of newly arrived **House Martins**.



Further again at the Portilla del Tietar, Angel's Tears Narcissus were in flower and vultures soared in the sunshine. Just as we were leaving a fine **Spanish Eagle** appeared circling in the blue sky. It was an excellent prolonged view in perfect light.

We made a couple of other stops before the grand cliff of Peña Falcon. As well as the vultures, we had good views of **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Crag Martin**.

### 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Madrigalejo and the rice fields, Puerto Peña and Alcollarín Reservoir.

The warm and sunny weather continued. We moved southwards, crossing the watershed to the Guadiana basin and as we approached the town of Madrigalejo we took a diversion to look for and successfully found a beautiful **Black-winged Kite**. South of Madrigalejo, the area was dominated by rice stubble fields and here we found perhaps a thousand **Common Cranes**

quietly feeding in the late morning sunshine. A tractor working nearby attracted egrets and numerous **Black-headed Gulls**. To the east we stopped at Puerto Peña, a hugely impressive rock face where the Guadiana River enters the centre of Extremadura. There were **Griffon Vultures** and **Crag Martins**. Returning to the rice fields, we saw more cranes, mainly in small family parties, another tractor attracting all three egret species, **Spoonbill** and lots of gulls. There were fields with **Glossy Ibis**, **Yellow** and **White Wagtails**, and waders (including **Dunlin**, **Little Stint**, **Spotted Redshank** and **Little Ringed Plover**). A large northern-race **Peregrine** was chasing off a **Marsh Harrier** and then retrieved a dead wader floating in the water.



We completed the day at the amazing Alcollarín Reservoir, where there must have been nearly 20,000 duck, mainly **Shoveler** and **Pintail**. Under superb light conditions, we could enjoy this spectacle, with the duck quietly feeding on the still waters of the reservoir.

### **27<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Belén Plains, Villuercas Mountains, Berrocal of Trujillo**

We set off, on yet another warm and sunny day, to cross the plains of Belén, lying to the east of Trujillo. A stop at the start of the plains, afforded us a magnificent view across the plains with the Gredos and Villuercas Mountains on the horizon. We enjoyed very good views of larks as we crossed the plains, **Corn Buntings** and both **Spotless** and wintering **Common Starlings**.

From the plains we entered the magnificent *dehesas* in the hills near Berzocana. A vast area, with herds of Iberian pigs. Passing Berzocana we moved to Cañamero and the valley of the Ruercas where we had our picnic. Recent rain had made the path impassable that we had intended to use, and a religious procession, complete with band and fire-crackers made the area initially rather noisy, but the rocky hillsides were wonderful to look at as **Griffon Vultures** glided overhead.



We then moved north to a beautiful cork oak woodland overlooked by rocky crags and waited here. It was not too long before the bird we had hoped to see appeared: a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** flew in and then perched on a pinnacle in glorious sunshine. After savouring this sighting, we made a brief stop beside the gorge of the River Almonte where there was a Geniez's Wall Lizard.



Then, returning to the area north of Trujillo, in the granite landscape again, we heard and then saw a **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, another of our hoped-for species.

## 28<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Alange and Mérida

We travelled south-west to visit first the town of Alange, beside its eponymous reservoir. Hordes of **House Martins** were busy nest-building close to where we parked. We walked beside the reservoir for a short distance and found a **Black Wheatear** quite quickly which gave us several good views. **Black Redstarts** were also present, along with **Thekla Larks**. The reservoir was rather devoid of birds, save **Black-headed** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, **Great Crested Grebe** and **Egyptian Geese**.

From Alange we drove to nearby Mérida, passing some impressive **White Stork** nests on the way. Our original plan to walk on the Roman Bridge was thwarted by the arrival of a group of several hundred Sunday-walkers, so we moved instead to the Milagros Aqueduct, a truly amazing structure, complete with stork nests. A **Green Sandpiper**, **Grey Wagtail** and **Glossy Ibis** were also seen there. Then moved to the heart of Mérida to visit the National Museum of Roman Art (a wonderful building with a well set-out and very impressive collection) and thence to the Roman Amphitheatre and Theatre which were adjacent.



After having a picnic in the car park we spent the rest of the afternoon on the Roman Bridge where the highlights were about a dozen **Black-crowned Night Heron** and a **Hawfinch**.





**29<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Campo Lugar plains, Alcollarín Reservoir and Trujillo**

It was a rather cloudier day, but with barely any wind, it was very nevertheless very pleasant, and indeed the sun did come out in the afternoon. We visited the plains near the village of Campo Lugar first, obtaining a wonderful view of a **Great Bustard** in flight and good numbers of **Calandra Larks**. Lines of **Linnets** on the wires and several close **Hoopoes** were other birds to remember. At the edge of the village itself we found a roosting flock of no fewer than 75 **Stone Curlew**.

After another attempt to look for Eagle Owl, without success, we made a quick visit to Alcollarín Reservoir. Here the water level had risen dramatically since our last visit, and if anything there were even more ducks, perhaps as many as 25,000!

We then moved to Trujillo. After a delicious lunch in the Meseguera restaurant in the main square we spent the afternoon exploring part of the medieval part of the town. We saw the wonderful alter triptych of the St. Mary's Church, the Arab fort and the beautiful narrow streets and gates to the town walls. In the main square, as well as the famous statue of Pizarro, there were ornately decorated renaissance palaces, complete with **White Storks** and **Crag Martins**.



### **30<sup>th</sup> January 2024: Arrocampo and transfer to Madrid**

With some sadness farewells were bade at Casa Rural El Recuerdo and we set off shortly after 10.00. The sky was clear, the sun shone, but there was a rather fresh easterly wind. We stopped first of all near Trujillo on the edge of the plains where we enjoyed once more the song of **Corn Buntings**, seeing groups of **Calandra Larks** and some distant **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**.

Onward then to the Arrocampo Reservoir, near the village of Saucedilla where we spent the rest of the morning. Here we sought shelter in one of the hides from which we had lovely views of three **Western Swamphens** and groups of **Common Snipe**. Cheeky **House Sparrows** landed on the fence beside us, whilst hordes of **Great Cormorants** and some **Little Egret** flew across the reeds. A delightful group of **Black-crowned Night Heron** roosted near the information centre and squadrons of **Griffon Vultures** drifted overhead from the nearby Monfragüe National Park.



It was time to continue our journey, broken by a delicious tapas lunch at a motorway service station about halfway en route. We reached the hotel in Barajas just after 16.00.

#### **LIST OF SPECIES SEEN**

We did not attempt to chase as many species as possible, but instead to focus on some of the specialities and absorb the great variety of landscapes possible.

1. **Grey Lag Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
2. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen on three days.
3. **Wigeon:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
4. **Gadwall:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
5. **Teal:** Seen on pools in the plains and Alcollarín.
6. **Mallard:** Seen on most days.
7. **Pintail:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
8. **Northern Shoveler:** Seen on two days, huge numbers at Alcollarín.
9. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen in Monfragüe.
10. **Little Grebe:** Seen on pool in the plains.
11. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín and Alange.
12. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín reservoir.
13. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on most days.

14. **Little Bittern:** Heard at Arrocampo.
15. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
16. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on the rice fields.
17. **Little Egret:** Seen on most days.
18. **Great Egret:** Seen on three days.
19. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
20. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
21. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen on rice fields and at Mérida.
22. **Spoonbill:** Seen in rice fields and Alcollarín.
23. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
24. **Cinereous Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
25. **Spanish Eagle:** One seen on the plains and one in Monfragüe.
26. **Golden Eagle:** One seen Santa Marta de Magasca.
27. **Bonelli's Eagle:** A pair seen in Villuercas Mountains.
28. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
29. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost daily.
30. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost daily.
31. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on four days.
32. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen near Madrigalejo.
33. **Common Kestrel:** Seen most days.
34. **Merlin:** Seen on the plains.
35. **Peregrine:** A northern race bird seen on the rice fields.
36. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo.
37. **Moorhen:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
38. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
39. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín, Mérida and Arrocampo.
40. **Common Crane:** Seen on four days.
41. **Great Bustard:** Seen on the plains east of Cáceres and Campo Lugar Plains.
42. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on three days.
43. **Stone Curlew:** Seen near Campo Lugar.
44. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
45. **Golden Plover:** Seen on four days, in large numbers.
46. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen almost daily.
47. **Dunlin:** Seen on the rice fields.
48. **Little Stint:** Seen on the rice fields.
49. **Common Snipe:** Seen at Arrocampo.
50. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Seen at Alcollarín.
51. **Spotted Redshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
52. **Common Redshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
53. **Greenshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
54. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on the rice fields.
55. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen most days.
56. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen on three days.
57. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
58. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
59. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
60. **Woodpigeon:** Seen on most days.
61. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.

62. **Little Owl:** Recorded on three days.
63. **Kingfisher:** Seen on two days.
64. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
65. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard in the Villuercas and at Pago de San Clemente.
66. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
67. **Crested Lark:** Seen every day.
68. **Thekla Lark:** Seen most days.
69. **Woodlark:** Seen on three days.
70. **Skylark:** Seen on the plains north of Trujillo.
71. **Crag Martin:** Seen daily.
72. **Barn Swallow:** Seen almost daily.
73. **Western House Martin:** Seen on four days.
74. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
75. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen at Mérida.
76. **Western Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields.
77. **White Wagtail:** Seen almost daily.
78. **Wren:** Heard on several days.
79. **Dunnock:** Heard at in the Villuercas.
80. **Robin:** Recorded most days.
81. **Bluethroat:** Seen briefly in the rice fields.
82. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost daily.
83. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
84. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Alange.
85. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen on two days.
86. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
87. **Song Thrush:** Seen almost daily.
88. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen in the Villuercas.
89. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded on three days.
90. **Zitting Cisticola:** Recorded on three days.
91. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
92. **Blackcap:** Seen daily.
93. **Chiffchaff:** Seen daily.
94. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
95. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
96. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
97. **Nuthatch:** Heard on two days.
98. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Heard on three days.
99. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
100. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
101. **Common Magpie:** Seen daily.
102. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
103. **Raven:** Seen almost daily.
104. **Common Starling:** Seen on Belén Plains.
105. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
106. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
107. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen daily.
108. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
109. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Campo Lugar

110. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
111. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
112. **Greenfinch:** Seen on one day.
113. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
114. **Linnet:** Seen on four days.
115. **Siskin:** Seen on one day.
116. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Mérida and Pago de San Clemente.
117. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

### **Mammals**

Red Deer

Egyptian Mongoose

### **Butterflies**

Green-striped White

Western Dappled White

Small White

Brimstone

Large Tortoiseshell

Holly Blue

Small Copper

A hawk moth, possibly Striped Hawk Moth

### **Reptiles and Amphibians**

Stripeless Tree Frog

Spanish Water Frog

Natterjack Toad

Spanish Terrapin

Geniez's Wall Lizard

### **Some plants**

Angel's Tears Narcissus

Mediterranean Catchfly

Narrow-leaved Asphodel

Common Asphodel