

TRIP TO EXTREMADURA : 14TH - 23RD NOVEMBER, 2018



Our Wonderful Accommodation of El Recuerdo

The latest group to travel to Spain on the 14th of November was comprised of Elizabeth Adams, Eppie Sweeney, Mollie & Euan Scroggie, Martin Robinson and Les Arkless. We left Edinburgh at 1215, and arrived in Madrid at 1600 a little ahead of schedule which was excellent, and we met our guide, Martin Kelsey, who had already hired our Citroen Jumper in Trujillo. Darkness was starting to fall just after 1800 but we managed to spot **White Storks**, a **Kestrel**, **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, **Wood Pigeons**, and **Common Magpies** plus **Ring-necked Parakeets** before having a comfort service station stop where we spotted a small bat in flight.

Claudia was waiting for us as we reached the wonderful Casa Rural of El Recuerdo at 2000. Half an hour later, we were enjoying the first of many fine meals. No meeting in the cosy lounge this evening as we were all quite keen to retire for the evening after Martin K had set a moth trap.

I always love the first full day here as we are able to explore the local environs at leisure. What was a great bonus this time on Thursday the 15th was having a look at the moth catch after our 0800 buffet breakfast when we met Yolande. We believe the moths were Streak, Feathered Thorn, Shuttle-shaped Dart, Black Rustic, Large Ranunculus, a possible Beautiful Brocade and Beaded Chestnut.

It was almost the perfect day to be out and about with virtually no wind, 17 degrees Celsius and 6/8 cloud. We were happy to linger in the yard, spotting **Azure-winged Magpies, Hawfinch, Spotless Starlings, Robins, Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Blackcaps, House Sparrows, Goldfinch, Crag Martins** and **Collared Doves**. Les rescued a Marbled Newt from the swimming pool.

Once out and about in the local, autumnal leafy lanes, we added **Hoopoes, Crested Larks, Woodlarks, Grey Wagtail, Wren** (call only), **Sardinian Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Black Redstarts, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Short-toed Treecreeper** (Les), **Cirl Bunting**, an amazing passage of around 200 **Chaffinches, Greenfinches** and in the sky we added 10 **Red Kites, Sparrowhawk, 5 Black Vultures** and around 50 **Griffon Vultures** as well as our first taste of the wonderful **Common Cranes** as small flocks amounting to 74 birds were on the move.

Martin R found a Natterjack Toad and a young Ladder Snake for us, and we added Small White, and Speckled Wood butterflies. We were intrigued by the small grasshoppers showing either red or blue when they jumped and flew. This morning walk through the Olive groves, Oleander, Strawberry Trees, Pines and Cork Oaks took us to a high point with a commanding view all around including our village of Pago de San Clemente.

We were back at El Recuerdo at 1315 for a break, and to have the packed lunches which we prepared after breakfast. Owing to the very pleasant conditions, we were able to have our lunches in the courtyard where we came across a Rhinoceros Beetle, and Martin R and I photographed more of the moths we caught last night.



The amazing Rhinoceros Beetle

We were back out at 1430 for another walk in the opposite direction, passing the beautiful old kirk. The trees round about this housed more **Hawfinches**, and during this walk we added Red Admiral by a barking Mastine, a possible Large Tortoiseshell, another **Sparrowhawk**, 7 overflying **Lapwings**, 2 **Black-headed Gulls**, an **Iberian Grey Shrike**, a pair of **Stonechats**, and 3 **Ravens**.

Once back at the church, the options were to return to our warm and cosy Casa Rural or continue our walk over towards the Finca de Santa Marta. Unfortunately, a very heavy unexpected shower of rain descended upon us. Some of us were not quite ready for this; so we sheltered the best we could under some overhanging branches. After 15 minutes, it was “almost not raining” but some of us were a tad damp and chilly; so returned to the comfort of our rooms. Four of us ventured on seeing scores of **Azure-winged Magpies**, **Corn Buntings**, **Linnets** and **Spanish Sparrows**.

Elizabeth came looking for us but missed us, and ended up being ‘chased’ by the owner of the local cafe, trying to attract her in ! We were back at 1740 with almost two hours to spare before our second lovely meal. Our first tick-list meeting in the very cosy lounge in front of the wood-burning open fire, produced 42 species.

There was again virtually no wind with 7/8 cloud on Friday the 16th which reached 17 degrees Celsius. Martin K was in charge today, and he took us into the plains and dehesa of Santa Marta de Magasca and the Monroy Road. Our first stop was at a fairly high point with a good walking track in front of us. It was relative quiet here with Martin K pointing out the differences between **Crested** and **Thekla Larks**. **Wood Larks** and **Calandra Larks** were also in song here as well as a flock of several hundred **Skylarks**. **Stonechats** were to the fore (as they were almost everywhere) along with **Black Redstarts**, **Meadow Pipits**, **Corn Buntings** and the ubiquitous **Lapwings**. I was almost giving up hope of seeing **Bustards** but Martin K spotted a strutting pair of **Great Bustards** for us and we saw them in flight. **Red Kites** and **Griffon Vultures** could be spotted 'floating' around whilst we had distant views of overflying **Pin-tailed** and **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** identified by their calls.

There was a fairly distant small pool housing **Teal**, **Grey Heron**, **Dabchick** and **Little Ringed Plover**. We had already noted a pair of **Mallard** and **Green Sandpiper** in flight. Several **Ravens** were also heard and seen along with the odd small party of **Common Cranes**. On the way back to the minibus, we noted several low, fast-flying moths but we had much difficulty in seeing them properly until one of them got caught up in a spider's web which enabled Martin K to identify it as the Winter Webworm or Ramur's Pellicle. Martin R found Autumn Squill.

Martin K now suggested a welcome cafe/comfort stop in the centre of Santa Marta de Magasca where our 10 euro kitty came into force. We next visited a view point looking over the Rio Magasca where **Robin**, **Sardinian Warbler** and **Great Tit** were singing or calling with four **Red Kites** roosting on a pylon. Close to them were a couple of **Hoopoes**.

The next river stop was at a bridge over the Rio Magasca for the second of our El Recuerdo packed lunches. Here, we added **Kingfisher** (Les), **Cirl Bunting** and **Hawfinch** whilst looking at Spanish Terrapin, the abundance of Autumn Buttercups (*Ranunculus bullatus*), *Narcissus serotina* with the odd Snowflake (*Leucojum autumnale*) thrown in. I also had a glimpse of a Fox here.

Another plain stop produced one of the highlights of the trip - around 200 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** in flight calling ! The odd **Iberian Grey Shrike** perched on a post whilst a few **Golden Plover** and a hunting **Hen Harrier** were added to the day's list.

A short distance further on, we stopped again at a road triangle from where we could catch a glimpse of a **Little Owl** (wee Hoolit) on a stone wall as another greyish Fox looked disdainfully at us, and even had a wee ! From here, we went for a walk along another very good track, and this time had great views of a flock of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, a male **Hen Harrier** and many more **Golden Plovers**. There were leaflets of Sea Squill along this track as we watched many more **Skylarks** and **Calandra Larks**. A dead Giant Centipede was noted, impaled on the barbed wire fence by an **Iberian Grey Shrike** as a Clouded Yellow butterfly flew past.

Our penultimate stop of the day was in the centre of Trujillo to give the Team 15 minutes of culture ! What an impressive town. **Jackdaws, Feral Pigeons** and 10 **Crag Martins** were wheeling around as we admired the mounted statue of Francisco Pizarro, the Spanish conquistador who led an expedition which conquered the Inca Empire.

Our last port of call was the Belen Plain where Martin K hoped to show us some **Stone Curlews**. We managed this from a vantage point just outside the village of Belen, and we estimated that there were around 20 birds. We were back at base by 1810 with plenty of time to prepare ourselves for the customary 1930 meal. After this, we retired to the cosy lounge with some of us enjoying a glass of Acorn Liqueur whilst noting the 71 bird species seen or heard so far.

It was my turn again to look after the Team on Saturday the 17th. I chose to go to the National Park of Monfrague as the forecast from now on was not quite so good, and we really needed a good day for this area. Once again, there were light winds with 7/8 cloud and 21 degrees Celsius.

Our first stop was at a bridge over the Rio Almonte where we noted **Corn Buntings, Meadow Pipits, White Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Crested Larks, Stonechats, Crag Martins, Fan-tailed Warbler** and heard an outburst from a **Cetti's Warbler** as well as Martin R spotting a Roe Deer as a **Woodlark** sang.

From here, we headed through Torrejon el Rubio and up to the car park below the castle. Martin K had suggested parking here (I normally park further up) to wait for the free bus service which would take us to within easy striking distance of the castle. This worked out very well indeed, and before very long, the acute hearing of Eppie and Martin R picked out the calls from a **Firecrest** which we all saw very well along with **Chiffchaffs** and **Long-tailed Tits**. From the castle itself, we had very good close encounters with **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** but much more distant views of a pair of **Peregrine Falcons** over the Pena Falcon peak. A Wall Brown butterfly alighted on a neighbouring rock before we descended by the 'tourist route' on the shaded side of the castle. We were able to look down on a couple of flights of **Cormorants** as we picked our way through the Holm Oaks. One of the main features here was the numbers of **Crag Martins** wheeling around the steep cliffs, and we also noted **Chaffinches, Goldfinches, Great Tits, Blue Tits, Blackcaps, Black Redstarts** and **Robins**. A few Red Admirals were observed as well as a possible Long-tailed or Short-tailed Blue, and Dor Beetles as we all walked back down to the car park.

It was now approaching comfort stop/ lunch stop time; so we headed for the touristy village of Villarreal de San Carlos where we found a couple of picnic benches in the very pleasant sunshine. There were the almost constant sounds of chirruping **House Sparrows** and singing **Linnets** as we ate our packed lunches whilst looking at a pair of **Hawfinches** through Les's telescope. If we had not had good views of a **Firecrest** earlier, we would have gone for a walk here but the fact that we had made

us decide to continue to the **Spanish Imperial Eagle** nesting site from where we observe at very close quarters the impressive **Griffon Vulture** colony, and managed to add **Golden & Spanish Imperial Eagles** in flight. We were a little surprised to add **Little & Great Egrets** here but not so surprised to have distant views of a male **Blue Rock Thrush** and more **Crag Martins**. **Jays** were also in evidence here along with **Azure-winged Magpies**.

I went to turn the minibus around to find that a couple of researchers were ensconced in the car park with table and chairs having a late lunch ! When I returned from turning the vehicle, the Team was waiting for me, and off we continued to the area of Pine Forest to look for some woodland birds. Martin R picked up a single call of **Crested Tit** but there was little else around apart from the odd **Black Redstart** and more **Long-tailed Tits**. Some of the Team spotted a couple of Red Deer in this area on the way out.

Our next stop was just before the long bridge over the Rio Tajo where we stopped for a scan around, seeing more **Griffon & Black Vultures** plus more noisy **Azure-winged Magpies**. From here, we motored to the last stop for the day which was at the Pena Falcon public viewing site where we spent a very good half-an-hour or so watching an immature **Blue Rock Thrush**, oodles of **Griffon Vultures**, a single **Egyptian Vulture** and **Crag Martins**. Just as we were about to leave, I was asked to take part in a Visitor Survey, and I had to chuckle when my answer to “How much money will each person be spending in Extremadura”? The chap was very surprised when I replied “10 euros”. He asked “Each day”? I said “No, 10 euros for the whole 8 days”! It was amazing that our 10 euro per person tea and coffee kitty lasted for the whole holiday with each person getting one euro back !

During the hour or so drive back to El Recuerdo, we added **Spotless Starlings**, **Common Buzzard**, **Red Kites**, **Common Kestrel**, **Wood Pigeons**, **Hoopoes**, **Iberian Grey Shrikes** and **Common Magpies**. We were back at base by 1800, allowing a very nice 90 minutes to relax and get ready for another grand meal. At the meeting, we noted that now we had recorded 86 bird species.

Unfortunately, the weather forecast was correct, and it was a bit of a nasty day on Sunday the 18th when Martin K took us down to the rice-fields. However, it was to be the worst day for rain. Luckily, there was very little wind again, and the temperature only reached 13 degrees Celsius. At the first bridge stop, the rain had not started and we were able to have a little time in the dry watching or listening to **Water Rail**, **Moorhen**, **Cetti's Warblers**, **Dunnock** (for Martin K), **Song Thrushes**, **Red Avadavat**, **Common Waxbills** and last but not least, hundreds of evocatively calling **Common Cranes**. It was not long before the rain started quite seriously; so for much of the day, much birdwatching had to be done through the rain-splattered windows ! It was interesting to note the American Poke-weed.



A couple of the evocatively calling Cranes

Martin drove us through some great wet rice-fields hosting many species including thousands of **Common Cranes** (130,000 winter in Extremadura), **Cattle Egrets**, **Little Egrets**, a single **Great Egret**, **Grey Herons**, **White Storks**, **Greylag Geese**, **Marsh Harriers**, **Golden Plover**, **Lapwings**, **Ringed Plovers**, **Little Ringed Plovers**, a single **Kentish Plover** (Martin K), 30 **Ruffs**, 100 **Dunlins**, 50 **Little Stints**, 300 **Black-winged Stilts** (much to the delight of Euan), 12 **Greenshanks**, 12 **Green Sandpipers**, 60 **Common Snipe**, 6 **Spotted Redshanks**, 50 **Glossy Ibis**, **Black-headed Gulls**, **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** and **White Wagtails**.

We had a welcome comfort/coffee stop before heading out again to more rice-fields seeing many of the same species before heading to a very good embalse called Azud de Canchalejas, housing 20 **Little Grebes**, 40 **Cormorants**, 2 **Egyptian Geese**, 300 **Mallards**, 20 **Teal**, 6 **Gadwalls**, 50 **Shovelers**, 10 **Pintails**, 20 **Wigeon**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Green Sandpiper** and 3 **Kingfishers**.

Once again, we were back in plenty of time to prepare for our evening meal, and afterwards in the cosy lounge, we reminisced over the 110 bird species seen so far.

Yesterday, we had trouble closing one of the side windows which resulted in some innovative ideas as to how we could stop the rain and draught coming in ! We managed but this necessitated Martin K taking the minibus back to the hirers in Trujillo to be fixed on Monday the 19th which was showery with again virtually no wind, 7/8 cloud and reaching 14 degrees Celsius. This was not a problem for us as it would enable us to have an extra local walk. The good news was that the window was sorted out very quickly but the bad news was that we would have to curtail our lovely morning walk when birds were active and vocal ! During our 'free' hour, we noted **Azure-winged Magpies, Spotless Starlings, Collared Doves, Black Redstarts, Linnets, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Hawfinches, Crag Martins, Sardinian Warblers, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Robins and Song Thrushes**. Les found a dead Marbled Newt for us. Not bad for a local stroll ! Once back at El Recuerdo, Martin R found another young Natterjack Toad for us whose skin was the perfect camouflage for the granite table in the courtyard !

Martin K was quite keen to take us out again today, and to visit the relatively local Embalse de Alcollarin where we spent the whole day watching some great birds such as over 100 **Little Grebes**, over 600 **Great Crested Grebes**, 6 **Black-necked Grebes**, **Little Egrets, Great Egrets, Grey Herons**, 20 **White Storks**, one **Black Stork**, 2 **Spoonbills**, 150 **Greylag Geese** (flying over), 16 **Egyptian Geese**, over 1,000 **Mallard**, over 800 **Teal**, at least 1,500 **Shovelers**, 30 **Gadwall**, a drake **Pochard**, a pair of **Red-crested Pochard**, a female **Tufted Duck**, 50 **Wigeon**, 30 **Pintail**, 4 **Shelducks**, **Coots**, 6 **Red Kites**, 4 **Marsh Harriers**, 2 **Black Vultures**, around 70 **Griffon Vultures**, a **Common Kestrel**, **Lapwings**, 6 **Little Ringed Plovers**, a **Dunlin**, 4 **Green Sandpipers**, 2 **Common Sandpipers**, 6 **Common Snipe**, an **Avocet**, 4 **Kingfishers**, 20 **Hoopoes**, 50 **Crag Martins**, **Cetti's Warblers**, **Mistle Thrush**, **Corn Buntings**, 70 **Jackdaws**, 2 **Ravens**, 7 **Common Cranes** and 6 **Red-legged Partridges**. What a wonderful array of species !



The wonderful Embalse de Alcollarin

The embalse is big enough that we could spend half a day at one end before visiting a nearby filling station cafe at Campo Lugar, having lunch at a picnic site, when there was an amazing sonic boom, and then continuing to the other side for more birdwatching !

So, it was not surprising that after another fine evening meal, our bird list jumped to 120 noted so far.

It was my turn again to take the Team out on Tuesday the 20th to the Campo Lugar road with a stiff S/W breeze blowing although it was not cold with showers, 7/8 cloud and 17 degrees Celsius. For those of us who had been along this 9 kilometre stretch of quiet road before, it was a bit disappointing but Euan found a **Great Bustard** for us, and a second bird joined it. Also noted were 3 **Black Vultures**, around 50 **Griffon Vultures**, 6 **Common Kestrels**, **Red Kites**, **Golden Plovers**, **Lapwings** galore, **Calandra Larks**, **Skylarks**, **Crested Larks**, **Thekla Larks**, **Meadow Pipits**, **White Wagtails**, **Stonechats**, **Iberian Grey Shrike**, **Corn Buntings** and several **Ravens**. As I said to the Team, if this had been our first day out, we would have been delighted with these species !

As we approached Campo Lugar to go to the same filling station cafe as yesterday, Martin R decided that his legs were getting just a bit too twitchy; so instead of a comfort/coffee stop, he elected to start walking back along the way we had come. After our break, we picked up Martin R to head south towards Madrigalejo and turning off towards the Solar Power Station. A short distance along this road is a tower hide overlooking a small wetland area. So, we stopped here to take our packed lunches. Martin R spotted a Small Copper butterfly from the vehicle, and in the surrounding area we noted **Marsh Harrier, Common Kestrel** (a pellet was found), **Common Buzzard, Azure-winged Magpies** and **White Storks**.

Mollie had reminded me that on her last visit, we had taken a very nice walk further along this road beside a field of sunflowers; so we headed for there. We found the same spot okay but, not surprisingly, the sunflowers had changed to thousands of young Olive trees and not quite so good for birds. However, we went for a walk anyway in the relative shelter from the strong breeze to find a Red Admiral, scores of **Spanish Sparrows, Song Thrushes, Black Redstarts**, several **Chiffchaffs, White Wagtails** and best of all, a hunting female **Merlin**.

We searched the rice-fields close to the Solar Power Station, and came across a very good patch containing around 500 **Common Cranes, 50 Cattle Egrets, a Little Egret, Grey Herons, 3 White Storks, Marsh Harriers, Lapwings** and **Black-headed Gulls**.

From here, we motored alongside the culverts pertaining to the Sierra Brava Embalse before actually reaching this reservoir. It was raining when we arrived at the car park; so we waited for 7 1/2 minutes for it to stop. Martin R estimated at least 5,000 **Shovelers** were on the water along with several **Great Crested Grebes** but the find of the afternoon was three lovely **Wood Larks** preening on the branch of a nearby Ratama bush.

Once again, we were back in plenty of time to get ready for another lovely meal after which we met up in the lounge to note that we had seen 123 bird species in six days.

It was happily back to gentler winds on Wednesday the 21st with 3/8 cloud, the odd shower and 14 degrees Celsius. It was Martin K's turn to drive the minibus once again, and we drove back down towards the rice-fields as these areas held the most birds. Martin K announced that we would take a slight detour to the Sierra Brava Embalse once again to have a look for an owl. We assumed that we would be looking for a Little Owl as one of the old buildings here is good for them. We stopped at this building for a scan but only noted **Spotless Starlings** and **Feral Pigeons**. At the next stop, we could hardly believe our ears when Martin K stated that he was looking at an **Eagle Owl** through his 'scope ! We all had great views of a bird on a small cliff. Round about, we added **Crag Martins, Black Redstart, Sardinian Warbler, Grey Herons, Kestrel, Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard** and a fly-past of around 200 **Cormorants**.

Now for some real birdwatching ! The relatively close rice-fields produced more **Common Cranes, Cattle Egrets, White Storks, Marsh Harriers, Kestrels and Lapwings** as well as some good small birds including **Common Waxbills** and very good views of male **Red Avadavats**. We also had a glimpse of a **Bluethroat**. At one stop, there was a very good finch flock housing **Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, 2 Bramblings, Spanish Sparrows** and a **Serin**.

Now it was time for the statutory coffee cum comfort stop, and this time it was in the very quiet village of Vegas Alta. From here, we journeyed to the Orellana Embalse where we noted 20 **Little Grebes, Great Crested Grebes, Great Egrets, 5 Black Storks, Mallard, Teal, Shovelers, 6 Common Pochard, 6 Tufted Ducks, 6 Pintail and Wigeon** as well as **Red Kites, Marsh Harriers, Griffon Vultures, 4 Common Sandpipers, Black-headed Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 2 Whiskered Terns, Coots, 50 Crag Martins and White Wagtails**. We also noted *Narcissus serotina*.



The amazing tiny Praying Mantis

This was a grand spot to partake of lunch beside the hide where Elizabeth found the most amazing Praying Mantis !

We had to travel quite a long way to reach another part of the embalse where we found 2 **Egyptian Geese** and more **Hoopoes**. This was to be our best day for this

latter species, recording around 30 birds. The rain started once again; so we headed for more rice-fields, spotting **White Storks, Marsh Harriers, Common Kestrels, Lapwings, Green Sandpipers, Common Snipe, Fan-tailed Warblers, Stonechats, Common Cranes** and best of all, two **Little Bustards** which took to flight and flew over the horizon. We drove to where we thought they had landed but to no avail, seeing a small flock of **Greylag Geese** instead.

We still had time to spend half-an-hour along the Campo Lugar road looking for more **Little Bustards**, and I spotted a very distant tight flock briefly of around 20 birds. Other species noted here were an Iberian Hare, a male **Hen Harrier, Golden Plovers, Calandra Larks, Corn Buntings**, a flock of around 200 **Common Starlings** and **Iberian Grey Shrike** as we experienced a double rainbow.



Our Double Rainbow on the Campo Lugar Road.

We were back at base by 6 pm, allowing plenty of time once again to get ready for our evening meal after which, in the lounge with the wood-burning fire, we noted the 128 bird species seen or heard so far.

I was looking after the Team on our last full day, and we chose to drive north towards Madrid as far as Almaraz and the Nuclear Power Station at Arrocampo. We were actually very lucky with the weather as the sky was leaden and looked like very heavy rain might fall all day but as it turned out, it was only on our first walk that we required our brollies after checking in at reception and obtaining a key for the hides. Owing to the initial inclement weather, we did not see very much until we motored on to the first hide beyond Saucedilla where we noted **Mallard, Gadwall, Teal and Shoveler**. A **Sparrowhawk** alighted briefly in a nearby tree before we went for a walk along a bank of the embalse, spotting **Chiffchaffs, Stonechats, Robins, Black Redstart** and a **White Stork** in the field plus a **Cormorant** which we initially thought was ailing ! **Red Kites** drifted over the distant Oak trees. We decided to give the area where we had our first walk in the rain another go, and this time saw **Cattle Egrets, Song Thrushes, Blackbirds, Robins, Spanish Sparrows, and Common Magpies**.

We returned to the reserve proper, parked the minibus in the official car park, and started our walk. **Marsh Harriers** and **Grey Herons** were to the fore as a few of us heard the “kek-kek-kek” calls from a **Little Bittern**. Our walk to the next hide produced **Corn Buntings**, more **Stonechats, Hoopoes**, the calls of **Cetti’s Warblers, Crested Larks** and a new species in **Reed Bunting**. Once the hide was reached, some of us went in for a sit-down inside whilst others made use of the elevation of the ramp leading to the hide, and saw and heard a couple of **Purple Gallinules** ! A little further on produced good views of **Fan-tailed Warblers, Meadow Pipits** and **Linnets** plus two late **Swallows** whilst Martin R had a glimpse of a possible **Bluethroat**.

Martin K had suggested that if we had the time, we should repay a visit to the Monroy/Santa Marta de Magasca Road to have a final shot at seeing Little Bustards better. Before this, though, we stopped at the edge of the reserve at the side of the main road to have a search for the elusive **Black-shouldered Kite** of which Martin K had informed us. We had no luck from the hide area but on driving off, Les spotted a hunting bird on our right !

It took longer to reach our Little Bustard spot, and on arrival, we were able this time to get the ‘scopes onto the **Little Owl** perched on the stone wall. A little further along the road, we stopped again where we previously had the spectacular experience of the calling **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** in flight. There were still about 80 here along with the usual **Lapwings** and **Golden Plovers** but no Little B’s ! We noted the odd **Black & Griffon Vulture** as well as another hunting male **Hen Harrier**.

With the light just starting to fade, we headed for El Recuerdo where we reached by 5.30 pm allowing plenty of time to do a bit of packing before our last supper ! Our final bird tally was a very respectable 134 species. I had mentioned to the Team that Extremadura is the best site in Europe for raptors, and I feel that this was justified as we noted 14 species ! We also recorded 9 types of butterfly plus many other interesting beasties plus a few plants. There was a slight sadness whilst sipping acorn liqueurs, knowing that we would be leaving the wonderful El Recuerdo and Extremadura tomorrow.

On Friday the 23rd of November, we left Claudia at 7 am with Martin K driving us to the airport via the usual watering hole. We reached the airport with exactly 2 hours until our 1220 flight which went well, and we arrived in Edinburgh 35 minutes early ! The ground crew were, not surprisingly, not ready for us; so we had to wait about 15 minutes. This was okay but we did not expect the half-an-hour delay at the passport gates ! Anyway, we all arrived home safely after yet another fine holiday thanks mostly to Martin & Claudia Kelsey for looking after us so well.

Russell Nisbet.