

## Birding Extremadura and Casa Rural El Recuerdo

### HOLIDAY REPORT FOR SUE

29<sup>th</sup> November – 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019

#### Itinerary

**29<sup>th</sup> November 2019:** Transfer from Mérida to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

**30<sup>th</sup> November 2019:** Plains west of Trujillo

**1<sup>st</sup> December 2019:** Sierra Brava and rice fields near Madrigalejo

**2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019:** Hornachos and Mérida

**3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019:** Campo Lugar plains and Alcollarín Reservoir

**4<sup>th</sup> December 2019:** Arrocampo Reservoir and Monfragüe National Park

**5<sup>th</sup> December 2019:** Ambroz Valley, la Garganta and Cápara

**6<sup>th</sup> December 2019:** Return to Madrid

#### TRIP REPORT

**29<sup>th</sup> November 2019: Transfer from Mérida to Casa Rural El Recuerdo**

Martin met Sue off the bus from Cadiz at Mérida bus station at 21.40 and we headed straight to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, arriving at about 22.50.

**30<sup>th</sup> November 2019: Plains west of Trujillo**

The day dawned clear and sunny, but magically mist rose from the valley and as we set off there was quite thick fog. However just a few kilometres from home we emerged from the gloom and back out into open vistas. The day stayed bright but gradually more overcast until lunchtime, by when light but continuous rain started falling.

We explored the open plains to the west of Trujillo towards Cáceres. At our first stop we enjoyed watching throngs of **Spanish Sparrows** as they decorated a tree in their hundreds. **Crested, Thekla** and **Calandra Larks** were numerous, outmatched only by **Lapwings** in every field. We saw both **Pin-tailed** and **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. We stopped for coffee in the bar in Santa Marta de Magasca and were given a plate of the typical Extremaduran winter fare of *migas*. From there we looked at the plains closer to Cáceres, where we found a nice group of **Great Bustard** and more large flocks of larks. We used the shelter of a hide for lunch, admiring the languid buoyant gliding of **Red Kite**. We then returned past Santa Marta de Magasca and stopped at the Magasca River

now flowing for the first time in nine months and where swathes of Autumn Buttercup were in flower. Just as we left we had great views of three **Golden Eagles** flying low nearby. Back on the plains the weather closed in, so we decided to make tracks back home.

### **1<sup>st</sup> December 2019: Sierra Brava and rice fields near Madrigalejo**



The day started with very heavy rain which persisted for most of the morning, then with a gradually improved afternoon. We headed southwards, past Zorita and across the plains towards our first stop at the Sierra Brava reservoir. Here we watched briefly a pair of **Eagle Owl** stoically sitting the weather out. We then entered the rice growing area, seeing quickly some groups of **Common Cranes** and small flocks of **Grey Lag Geese**. Continuing onto the area near Palazuelo, we found a tractor mashing up the wet, muddy stubble, attracting a frenzy of gulls, egrets, **White Storks** and **Grey Herons**. How the birds remained spotless whilst the tractor was wholly splattered by mud caused us great puzzlement.

After an excellent coffee at Madrigalejo we headed east, making a stop at the Orellana Reservoir (and seeing a **Black-winged Kite** on the way), here there were a nice selection of duck, **Great Crested Grebes** and **Common Coot**. We then headed to Moheda Alta to avail ourselves use of the hide for our picnic. Groups of **Common Cranes** were feeding nearby and we also saw both **Hen** and **Marsh Harrier**, as well as some very obliging **Stonechats**.



We explored more rice fields for the rest of the afternoon, seeing many hundreds of **Common Crane** and groups of **Grey Lag Geese**. We completed the day with heavy threatening skies looking at the **Eagle Owl** again.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019: Hornachos and Mérida**

We enjoyed fine weather today, although with a rather fresh easterly wind. The sky often had dramatic cloudscapes but it remained dry. We drove southwards as far as the magnificent sierra of Hornachos. Here we walked past the edge of the small town, nestled on the western side of the mountain, up the Valley of the Christians, giving us a lovely view across the region, as well as the remains of the Arab fort high above us on the crags. During the walk we had lovely views of **Black Wheatear** and **Thekla Larks**.

We stopped at Alange dam for lunch, with **Crag Martins** hawking insects above us. Then it was to Mérida where we had a lovely walk across the Roman Bridge, through the park to the Aqueduct of Los Milagros and then back across the modern Lusitanian Bridge. We were surprised to see a pair of **Booted Eagles** (summer visitors to Extremadura), had a wonderful long sighting of a male **Little Bittern** and a very obliging **Kingfisher**. The trees in the park beside the river Guadiana were splendid in their autumn colours.





### **3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019: Campo Lugar plains and Alcollarín Reservoir**

It was a beautiful sunny day with a somewhat fresh easterly wind. We headed southwards on to the plains of Campo Lugar. The visibility was amazing, with distant mountain ranges clear on the horizon. As soon as we stopped on the plains of Campo Lugar, we found a group of six **Little Bustard** and just a few minutes later, ten **Great Bustards**. But what was awe-inspiring was the constant sight and sound of small birds: lark song and flocks of **Meadow Pipits** and **Calandra** and **Skylarks** in the fields, along with numerous **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover**. On some small pools we also found a nice selection of duck including several **Wigeon**.





After an excellent coffee in Campo Lugar we spent the rest of the day around the Alcollarín Reservoir, with a picnic under the shade of holm oak trees. Again the sheer number of birds was extraordinary. Most delightful was the sight of “vortexing” **Shovelers**. We also had lovely views of a **Black Stork**, as well as a **Golden Eagle** coming in to attack waterfowl. **Kingfishers**, **Hen Harrier** and **Spoonbill** were all a strong supporting cast, as well as the flocks of sheep and goats being attended to by their companion dogs and shepherds.





#### 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019: Arrocampo Reservoir and Monfragüe National Park

It was a sunny morning, but cloud gathered and there was light rain at the end of the afternoon. Our first stop was the Arrocampo Reservoir, welcomed by a **Black-winged Kite** beside the road as we arrived. We had great views of **Purple Swamphen** (alongside **Moorhen** and **Common Coot** providing a nice size comparison), masses of **Common Chiffchaffs**, flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** and **Serins**. There were **Common Cranes** passing overhead and we saw a **Sparrowhawk**.

Then after coffee at edge of Monfragüe to National Park, we started our visit there. It was overcast, so very few vultures were flying. At the Portilla del Tietar viewpoint, we heard **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and watched groups of **Great Cormorants** passing by. We had a lovely picnic in a pine wood. Here there was a good selection of small birds including **Coal Tit** and **Crested Tit**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and **Short-toed Treecreeper**. We finished at the Salto de Gitano to watch **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart**, **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** as well as impressive Red Deer stags.

We made a stop at the River Almonte, now flowing at last after so many months of drought.

#### 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019: Ambroz Valley, la Garganta and Cápara

We enjoyed fine sunny weather all day, although there was some cloud in the morning in the mountains.



We headed to the extreme north of Extremadura, passing Plasencia and continuing to the flat floodplain of the Ambroz valley. Here in maize stubble

fields we saw **Common Cranes** and flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** and finches, and a lovely vignette of a **Green Sandpiper** with three **Rock Sparrows**. After a welcome coffee at Zarza de Granadilla, we continued north to the very border of Extremadura, passing Baños de Montemayor and ascending past La Garganta (a mountain village at 3,700 feet above sea-level, the second highest in Extremadura). We had a lovely walk on the mountain, with flocks of **Brambling** and **Chaffinches** as well as **Redwings**, **Carrion Crows** and **Crossbill**.

After our picnic and another walk, we made a slow descent, stopping to see the old wolf trap (last used in the 1960s) and the icehouse.

We stopped at the Roman city of Cáparra in the Alagón valley to admire the magnificent *quadrifrons* gate.



It was then back to Casa Rural El Recuerdo in a lovely late afternoon winter light, stopping to admire the **Griffon Vultures** over the rocs of Peña Falcon.

## **6<sup>th</sup> December 2019: Return to Madrid**

We set off shortly after nine in the morning, to a fine, sunny day. It being the start of a holiday weekend there was a huge amount of traffic heading out of Madrid and the last 100 km a contraflow system was in operation to provide an additional lane of traffic. This slowed down the lighter flow of traffic heading to the city. Luckily, we had given ourselves a leeway in time to accommodate this, meaning that we arrived at the airport as scheduled at 12.20, with ample time for the check-in.

## **Check List of Birds seen**

1. **Grey Lag Goose:** Seen on the rice fields and Alcollarín Reservoir.
2. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarín Reservoirs.
3. **Common Shelduck:** Two at Alcollarín.
4. **Wigeon:** Seen on pools near Campo Lugar and Alcollarín.
5. **Gadwall:** Seen on most water bodies.
6. **Teal:** Seen at Alcollarín and at River Almonte.
7. **Mallard:** Seen on most days.
8. **Shoveler:** Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana Reservoirs.
9. **Pochard:** Present at Orellana Reservoir.
10. **Tufted Duck:** A small group at Alcollarín.
11. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen on two days.
12. **Little Grebe:** Present at Alcollarín.
13. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín in large numbers, also Orellana and at Mérida.
14. **Black-necked Grebe:** one at Alcollarín.
15. **Great Cormorant:** Seen daily.
16. **Little Bittern:** Seen at Mérida and heard at Arrocampo.
17. **Cattle Egret:** Seen most days, especially on rice fields.
18. **Little Egret:** Seen most days.
19. **Great White Egret:** Seen at Alcollarín.
20. **Grey Heron:** Seen most days.
21. **Black Stork:** One at Alcollarín.
22. **White Stork:** Seen on three days.
23. **Spoonbill:** One at Alcollarín.
24. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen most days.
25. **Black Vulture:** Seen on three days.
26. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Heard at Monfragüe.
27. **Golden Eagle:** Seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and at Alcollarín.
28. **Booted Eagle:** A pair at Mérida.
29. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
30. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen most days.
31. **Hen Harrier:** Seen on three days.
32. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
33. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on three days.
34. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen on three days (near Madrigalejo, at Arrocampo and near Navalморal de la Mata).
35. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
36. **Merlin:** One seen on the plains near Santa Marta de Magasca.
37. **Moorhen:** Seen at Alcollarín and Arrocampo.
38. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
39. **Common Coot:** seen on several days.
40. **Common Crane:** Seen almost daily.
41. **Little Bustard:** Seen on Campo Lugar plains.
42. **Great Bustard:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo and Campo Lugar.
43. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on two days.
44. **Golden Plover:** Seen on the plains.
45. **Lapwing:** seen daily.
46. **Common Snipe:** Seen at Alcollarín.



47. **Greenshank**: Seen on rice fields and Alcollarín.
48. **Green Sandpiper**: Seen on several days.
49. **Common Sandpiper**: Seen on two days.
50. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen on most days.
51. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen almost daily.
52. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
53. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
54. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon**: seen daily.
55. **Stock Dove**: Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
56. **Woodpigeon**: Seen at Mérida.
57. **Collared Dove**: Seen daily.
58. **Eagle Owl**: Seen at Sierra Brava.
59. **Little Owl**: Seen at Sierra Brava.
60. **Kingfisher**: Seen on several days.
61. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
62. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen at Monfragüe.
63. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on the plains.
64. **Crested Lark**: Seen daily.
65. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on most days.
66. **Skylark**: Seen on most days.
67. **Crag Martin**: Seen on most days.
68. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen daily.
69. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen daily.
70. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
71. **Wren**: Recorded on two days.
72. **Dunnock**: Heard at Hornachos.
73. **Robin**: Seen daily.
74. **Bluethroat**: Seen on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
75. **Black Redstart**: Seen on several days.
76. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
77. **Black Wheatear**: Seen at Hornachos.
78. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Recorded at Hornachos and Monfragüe.
79. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
80. **Song Thrush**: Seen most days.
81. **Redwing**: A flock at La Garganta.
82. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen on two days.
83. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded on two days.
84. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen at Arrocampo.
85. **Dartford Warbler**: Seen on two days.
86. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen most days.
87. **Blackcap**: Seen most days.
88. **Common Chiffchaff**: Recorded daily.
89. **Firecrest**: Seen at Monfragüe.
90. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen at Monfragüe and La Garanta.
91. **Crested Tit**: Seen at Monfragüe and La Garanta.
92. **Coal Tit**: Seen at Monfragüe and La Garanta.
93. **Blue Tit**: Seen on several days.
94. **Great Tit**: Seen almost daily.
95. **Nuthatch**: Seen at Monfragüe.
96. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Seen at Monfragüe and La Garanta.

97. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Arrocampo.
98. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen almost daily.
99. **Jay:** Seen at Monfragüe and La Garanta.
100. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
101. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
102. **Jackdaw:** Seen on three days.
103. **Carrion Crow:** Seen at La Garganta.
104. **Raven:** Seen on several days.
105. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains.
106. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
107. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
108. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
109. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen in Ambroz valley.
110. **Red Avadavat:** seen on rice fields.
111. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
112. **Chaffinch:** Seen on several days.
113. **Brambling:** Seen at La Garganta.
114. **Serin:** Seen most days.
115. **Greenfinch:** Seen on several days.
116. **Goldfinch:** seen most days.
117. **Linnet:** seen on most days.
118. **Red Crossbill:** One at La Garganta.
119. **Hawfinch:** Seen at Monfragüe and at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.
120. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe and La Garanta.
121. **Corn Bunting:** Seen most days.

## **Other wildlife**

Egyptian Mongoose  
Red Deer

Clouded Yellow butterfly  
Migrant Hawker dragonfly