

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR LOUIS AND GOSIA
Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura
9th – 16th February 2019

Itinerary

9th February 2019: Transfer from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Arrocampo Reservoir

10th February 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Belén

11th February 2019: Sierra Brava Reservoir, rice fields near Palazuelo, Alcollarín Reservoir.

12th February 2019: Villuercas Mountains

13th February 2019: La Serena, Orellana Reservoir, the rice fields near Vegas Altas and Sierra Brava Reservoir

14th February 2019: Campo Lugar, Santa Amalia, Alange, Mérida, Montánchez and Trujillo

15th February 2019: Monfragüe National Park, plains north of Trujillo and Trujillo town.

16th February 2019: Departure from Casa Rural El Recuerdo with stops on plains north of Trujillo, Trujillo town and Saucedilla.



TRIP REPORT

9th February 2019: Transfer from Madrid to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, with stop at Arrocampo Reservoir

Gosia and Louis arrived just 15 minutes later than scheduled on a misty morning in Madrid. It was quite foggy as we took the ring road around the southern half of Madrid and then headed south-west on the motorway to Extremadura. By the time we stopped for a break, roughly halfway on the journey, the sun was shining, and we had magnificent views of the snow-capped Gredos Mountains to the north. On the drive we had seen **White Storks**, numerous **Red Kites** and **Common Cranes** feeding in the *dehesa* woodland. We made a stop at the Arrocampo Reservoir, near the village of Saucedilla, where we had our picnic. **Barn Swallows** and **House Martins** flew overhead, as did several **Black** and **Griffon Vultures**. In the marsh beside the water, we had nice views of **Purple Swamphen**. The place was full of **Common Chiffchaffs**. A tree held a group of **Black-crowned Night Herons**, all fast asleep, their bills tucked into their breast feathers. We took a small road to the west of Saucedilla and watched a **Black-winged Kite** hovering at length. On a pool we found a very elegant **Black-winged Stilt**, whilst further on an early **Egyptian Vulture** flew in front of us.

We returned to the marsh, for more views of **Purple Swamphen** and we rewarded by a group of five **Glossy Ibis**, which flew close by.



We then headed for Casa Rural El Recuerdo, making an unscheduled stop just five kilometres from our destination to watch a wonderful immature **Spanish Imperial Eagle** with a group of **Common Magpies** in association. Eventually it flew off, being mobbed by a **Common Buzzard** and a **Raven**.

We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 17.30.

10th February 2019: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and Belén

It was a generally cloudy day with a rather fresh south-westerly wind. We explored the plains to the west of the town of Trujillo, making a series of stops initially at the edge of the plains, with *dehesa* oak wood pasture to our south. There were large flocks of **Spanish Sparrow** and regular sightings of **Red Kites**. **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were present at almost every place we stopped to bird from. We found a large flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, which stood in excellent light, at the brow of a rise in a pasture. Shortly afterward two **Great Bustards** flew to the south of us and landed in an area of scattered trees, to join four other birds. We also had prolonged and delightful views of foraging **Hoopoes**. Nearby, at another stop we found a group of six **Great Bustard**, and a party of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**.

After a break for coffee, we entered the plains south-west of the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. There were flocks of **Corn Buntings** and **Skylarks**, with **Calandra Larks** singing. We took shelter in a hide during a very brief shower, seeing a party of **Golden Plovers**. We also had close views of two **Black Vultures**.

Our next stop was beside the River Tamuja, where groups of **Griffon Vultures** and **Red Kites** were drifting over, joined for a period by an adult and an immature **Bonelli's Eagle**.

We stopped for our picnic beside the Magasca River, watching **Crag Martins** and listening to several small birds, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Wren**, **Common Chiffchaff** and **Blackcap** amongst others. Back on the plains, the clouds had become heavier, so the light was poorer, but we had nice views of **Calandra Larks**, and flocks of **Corn Buntings**. At the edge of the granite outcrops near Trujillo we also saw **Thekla Larks**. Abandoned farm buildings were adorned by **White Stork** nests. On the Belen Plains, amongst a flock of **Corn Buntings** and **Spanish Sparrow**, we had good views of a **Rock Sparrow**.

In the evening, after a short period of rain, Louis found three **Natterjack Toads** on his short post-dinner walk.

11th February 2019: Sierra Brava Reservoir, rice fields near Palazuelo, Alcollarín Reservoir.

It was a much milder day today, starting with a touch of mist, but very little wind and generally sunny, especially in the afternoon. We headed south, past the town of Zorita

and across the plains towards the reservoir of Sierra Brava. Here we saw a delightful **Little Owl**, followed just a few minutes later by a magnificent **Eagle Owl**, sunning itself on a rock face. On the reservoir itself were dozens of **Great Crested Grebes** and **Cormorants**.

After a stop for refuelling in Madrigalejo, we spent the morning on the rice fields near the village of Palazuelo. All the time we could hear **Common Cranes** and on occasions, there were several thousand in view at the same time. On fields being ploughed, gulls, egrets, herons and **White Storks** followed the tractors. On some muddy fields there were waders such as **Avocet** and **Greenshank**, and we saw a large flock of **Glossy Ibis**. Smaller birds were uncertainly not overlooked. **Water Pipits** and a surprise **Yellow Wagtail** on the fields, whilst the ditches had **Tree Sparrow**, **Common Waxbill**, **Red Avadavat** and **Bluethroat**.

We had lunch beside the Acollarín Reservoir where we spent the rest of the afternoon. On the main body of water there were thousands of ducks, especially **Shoveler** and **Teal**, along with a supporting cast of birds like **Pintail** and **Black-necked Grebe**. It was a beautiful afternoon, in a wonderful setting, with a bonus being a sighting of an **Otter**.

12th February 2019: Villuercas Mountains



It was a glorious day of sunshine, barely any wind. We headed south-east to the southern end of the Villuercas Mountains, stopping first just outside the town of Guadalupe. Here we walked through some mixed woodland beside a stream, where there was an old mill. There was a small party of **Siskin** feeding in alders and we found a singing **Firecrest**. After a visit to the church of Guadalupe we ascended to the highest point of the mountains, through bands of **Pyrenean Oak** and **Sweet Chestnut**. The views from the top were extraordinary, over 200 km to the snow-capped Guadarrama Mountains north of Madrid. There were brief glimpses of **Alpine Accentor**, but they were very elusive.

On our descent we walked through pine woods near Cañamero. Here we had wonderful views of **Crested Tit** and **Firecrest**, but what was most memorable perhaps were the butterflies, especially **Large Tortoiseshells** and a freshly emerged **Spanish Festoon**. We also found **Angel's Tears Narcissus** and **Mountain Crocus** in flower.



13th February 2019: La Serena, Orellana Reservoir, the rice fields near Vegas Altas and Sierra Brava Reservoir

It was yet another warm, spring-like day. We drove south again, crossing great reservoirs in the centre of Extremadura and entering the extraordinary vast landscape of the plains of La Serena (see photo on front page): huge expanses of sheep pasture and cereals, with distant mountains on the horizon. We spent a couple of hours at one location, finding within a few minutes the overwintering **Sociable Lapwing**, which then flew and only at the end did we relocate it and had prolonged views of this rare visitor from the steppes of central Asia. Whilst we were looking for it, we had the opportunity of good views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, as well as a multitude of larks, **Golden Plover** and **Lapwing**. As we left, we past a field with a flock of twenty male **Great Bustards**, close to the road and in superb light. It was spectacular sight.

We stopped for our picnic beside the Orellana Reservoir. Here we saw an overwintering **Whiskered Tern**, amongst **Black-headed Gulls** and a large flock of **Red-crested Pochard**, amongst other birds. It was a beautiful and peaceful spot and the warm sunshine was bringing forth a great show of **sand crocuses**.

From there we entered the rice fields near the village of Vegas Altas, seeing good numbers of **Cranes**, and waders such as **Dunlin** and **Lapwing**, but perhaps most memorable were a male and female **Hen Harrier** hunting over the rice stubble.

We made a brief stop at the Sierra Brava reservoir where there was an amazing raft of about two thousand **Pintail**.

14th February 2019: Campo Lugar, Santa Amalia, Alange, Mérida, Montánchez and Trujillo

Yet another sunny day with blue skies, although there was a fresher breeze at times during the day. We explored the area to the south-west of base, stopping first at the old silo near Campo Lugar where we saw three pairs of **Lesser Kestrel**. From there we drove onto the rice fields near the town of Santa Amalia. We had the pleasure of watching again large flocks of **Common Cranes**, a hunting female **Merlin** and some interesting groups of waders including passage **Black-tailed Godwits**, **Dunlin**, **Little Stint**, **Ruff** and a large party of **Common Ringed Plover** with two **Kentish Plover** present.

We then proceeded to the rocky outcrop and dam beside the Alange Reservoir. Within just a few minutes of starting our walk we had great views of a pair of **Black Wheatear**, as well as a male **Blue Rock Thrush**. The bushes were full of small birds: Blackcaps, **Thekla Larks**, **Common Chiffchaffs** and **Serins** for example. After our picnic there, we paid a visit to the Roman Bridge which crosses the Guadiana River in the centre of Mérida. We found a female **Little Bittern** and a roost of **Black-crowned Night Herons**.

Onward then to the castle at Montánchez, where after some effort we managed some brief views of an **Alpine Accentor**. A **Blue Rock Thrush** was also present here, as were **Black Redstart** and **Crag Martins**. Finally, we stopped beside the Bull Ring in Trujillo and enjoyed excellent views of a male **Lesser Kestrel** hovering over the roof and being mobbed at times by **Jackdaws** and **Common Magpies**.

15th February 2019: Monfragüe National Park, plains north of Trujillo and Trujillo town.

A sunny day throughout, although we had a somewhat fresher wind than in recent days.



We travelled north, past Trujillo and through an almost endless landscape of wood pasture, the famous *dehesa* of Extremadura. We reached the southern edge of the Monfragüe National Park, marked by the steep escarpment caused by the syncline of quartzite. We stopped briefly at the gateway to the park, the hugely impressive Peña Falcon, overlooking the Tajo River. Dozens of **Griffon Vultures** were circling slowly over the cliffs. We then continued through the park to make our next stop at the Portilla del Tiétar, standing at a viewpoint looking across the Tiétar river to the rocks opposite. As soon as we had arrived, a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was being mobbed by two

Ravens and for the next hour or so, the eagle made frequent appearances, either pursued by or pursuing the corvids. It sometimes perched on the rocks. We enjoyed superb views of it in excellent light. We had time also to watch the arrival and departure of **Griffon Vultures**, a few **Black Vultures**, **Red Kite**, **Peregrine** and **Sparrowhawk**.

After a short break near a cork oak grove, we returned through the park, making a series of stops. **Serins** sang everywhere whilst there were always vultures in the skies. We completed the visit with a stop at the Peña Falcon rock. Here we saw **Peregrine**, **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Black Redstarts**, as well as the vultures, and caught a glimpse of a **Black Stork** flying quickly past, just above the water.

As we returned towards Trujillo, we made a short detour onto the plains, where **Calandra Larks** were singing. In Trujillo, we visited the castle and the Plaza Mayor, seeing the nesting **White Storks** and a pair of mating **Lesser Kestrels** on a palace beside the square.

16th February 2019: Departure from Casa Rural El Recuerdo with stops on plains north of Trujillo, Trujillo town and Saucedilla, then onward to Madrid.



We left Casa Rural El Recuerdo shortly before nine and returned first to the plains north of Trujillo. Although we failed to locate Little Bustard, the wonderful morning light and excellent conditions meant that we had a very enjoyable hour or so, watching a very large flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, some **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, a **Merlin**, three **Great Bustard** and great views of **Calandra Lark**, not to mention large flocks of **Goldfinch** and **Linnet** – so it was an excellent start of the day. Not forgetting **Hoopoe** and **Iberian Grey Shrikes** well.

We went into Trujillo and saw **Lesser Kestrels** on the silo buildings at the edge of town, and some **Little Ringed Plover** in the small park, San Lazaro. **Serins** were in full song. Onward then to the Arrocampo Reservoir, where despite the wind we had excellent views of at least three **Black-winged Kites**, as well as passing **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**. It gave us an opportunity too to say goodbye to a **Black-winged Stilt** and an endearing **Little Owl**.

After a brief stop at a small pool where there were **Shelduck**, **Pochard**, **Wigeon** and **Tufted Duck** we continued to Madrid. The lack of traffic meant that we arrived ahead of schedule with plenty of time for Louis and Gosia to proceed to check.in.

Annotated Species List

Birds

1. **Greylag Goose**: Small number seen at Alcollarín.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana Reservoirs.
3. **Common Shelduck**: Flock of 23 at Sierra Brava on 13th February, also two seen on return to Madrid.
4. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín and Sierra Brava.
5. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín and on return to Madrid.
6. **Teal**: Seen most days.
7. **Mallard**: Seen every day.
8. **Pintail**: Seen at Alcollarín and Sierra Brava Reservoir (with over two thousand there on 13th February).
9. **Shoveler**: Seen on several water bodies, with thousands present at Alcollarín.
10. **Red-crested Pochard**: Flock of 75 at Orellana Reservoir on 13th February.
11. **Pochard**: Seen at Alcollarín and on return to Madrid.
12. **Tufted Duck**: Seen on several water bodies in small numbers.
13. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on most days.
14. **Little Grebe**: Seen almost every day.
15. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen on several water bodies.
16. **Black-necked Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín and Orellana Reservoirs.
17. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost daily.
18. **Little Bittern**: Seen in Mérida on 14th February and also heard at Arrocampo.
19. **Cattle Egret**: Seen in large numbers on rice fields and at Arrocampo.
20. **Little Egret**: Small numbers on the rice fields and seen almost daily.
21. **Great Egret**: Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.

22. **Grey Heron:** Seen every day.
23. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Roosts seen at Arrocampo on 9th and at Merida on 14th February.
24. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
25. **Black Stork:** On at Monfragüe on 15th February.
26. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Arrocampo and on rice fields.
27. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Arrocampo and on rice fields.
28. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
29. **Black Vulture:** Seen daily.
30. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** An immature seen near Trujillo on 9th and an adult in Monfragüe on 15th February.
31. **Bonelli's Eagle:** An adult and an immature seen at River Tamuja on 10th February.
32. **Red Kite:** Seen daily.
33. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost every day.
34. **Hen Harrier:** Seen on rice fields on 13th February.
35. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
36. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen on three occasions.
37. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen at Arrocampo on both visits.
38. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen at Campo Lugar on 14th and in Trujillo on 15th and 16th February.
39. **Common Kestrel:** Seen daily.
40. **Merlin:** Seen on rice fields near Santa Amalia and plains near Trujillo.
41. **Peregrine:** Seen in Monfragüe.
42. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo.
43. **Moorhen:** Recorded in rice fields and at Arrocampo.
44. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
45. **Common Coot:** Seen on several days.
46. **Common Crane:** Seen almost daily and several thousand on rice fields.
47. **Great Bustard:** Seen on plains near Trujillo on 10th and 16th, and in La Serena on 13th February.
48. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen almost daily.
49. **Avocet:** Seen on rice fields on 11th February.
50. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at San Lazaro Park, Trujillo on 16th February.
51. **Ringed Plover:** Flock of 23 at Santa Amalia on 14th February.
52. **Kentish Plover:** Two at Santa Amalia on 14th February.
53. **Golden Plover:** Seen on plains.
54. **Northern Lapwing:** Seen daily almost daily.
55. **Sociable Lapwing:** One overwintering bird seen on La Serna on 13th February.
56. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields.
57. **Little Stint:** Seen at Santa Amalia on 14th February.
58. **Ruff:** Seen on rice fields on 11th and 14th February.
59. **Common Snipe:** Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
60. **Common Curlew:** Seen on rice fields near Palazuelo on 11th February.
61. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Small flocks at Santa Amalia on 14th February.
62. **Common Redshank:** Seen near Arrocampo on both visits.
63. **Greenshank:** Seen on rice fields.
64. **Green Sandpiper:** Singles seen most days.
65. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Orellana Reservoir on 13th February.
66. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen almost daily.
67. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen daily.
68. **Whiskered Tern:** Overwintering bird at Orellana Reservoir on 13th February.
69. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains near Trujillo and heard on La Serena.

70. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains north-west of Trujillo and at La Serena.
71. **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon:** Recorded daily.
72. **Stock Dove:** A small party on the plains near Trujillo on 10th February.
73. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
74. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
75. **Eagle Owl:** Spectacular view near Sierra Brava on 11th February.
76. **Tawny Owl:** Calling at Pago de San Clemente.
77. **Little Owl:** Seen at Sierra Brava and Arrocampo.
78. **Kingfisher:** Seen on several days.
79. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
80. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on plains.
81. **Skylark:** Seen on plains.
82. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
83. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost plains.
84. **Woodlark:** Heard singing on several days.
85. **Skylark:** Flocks on the plains and rice fields.
86. **Crag Martin:** Seen on several days.
87. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
88. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
89. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen almost daily.
90. **Water Pipit:** Seen on rice fields.
91. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on two days.
92. **White Wagtail:** Seen every day.
93. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on rice fields on 11th and Arrocampo on 16th February.
94. **Wren:** Seen on several days.
95. **Alpine Accentor:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains and Montánchez.
96. **Robin:** Seen daily.
97. **Bluethroat:** Seen on rice fields on 11th February.
98. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
99. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
100. **Black Wheatear:** Two at Alange on 14th February.
101. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Alange, Montánchez and Monfragüe.
102. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
103. **Song Thrush:** Seen on several days.
104. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen at Alcollarín.
105. **Cetti's Warbler:** Seen on several days.
106. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen on several days.
107. **Sardinian Warbler:** Recorded almost daily.
108. **Blackcap:** Seen or heard daily.
109. **Chiffchaff:** Seen or heard daily.
110. **Firecrest:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
111. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on several days.
112. **Crested Tit:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
113. **Blue Tit:** Seen almost daily.
114. **Great Tit:** Seen almost daily.
115. **Nuthatch:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
116. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded in Villuercas Mountains and Monfragüe.
117. **Penduline Tit:** Brief views at Arrocampo and heard at Mérida.
118. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
119. **Jay:** Heard in Monfragüe and Villuercas.
120. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.

121. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
122. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
123. **Raven:** Seen daily.
124. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains and at Arrocampo.
125. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
126. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
127. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen daily.
128. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on rice fields.
129. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on plains on 10th February.
130. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on rice fields.
131. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields.
132. **Chaffinch:** Seen almost daily.
133. **Serin:** Seen on several days.
134. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
135. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
136. **Siskin:** Seen in Villuercas Mountains.
137. **Linnet:** Seen daily.
138. **Hawfinch:** Seen briefly in Monfragüe, Alange and Pago de San Clemente.
139. **Rock Bunting:** Seen briefly in Villuercas Mountains.
140. **Reed Bunting:** Seen on rice fields.
141. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Mammals

Otter

Butterflies

Large Tortoiseshell

Spanish Festoon

Brimstone

Orange-tip

Small Copper

Clouded Yellow

Western Dappled White

Peacock