

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR JOHN AND PETER
Casa Rural El Recuerdo & Birding Extremadura
3rd – 12th February 2020



Itinerary

3rd February 2020: Transfer from Madrid

4th February 2020: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Puerto Peña, Campo Lugar, Alcollarín and Sierra Brava.

5th February 2020: Plains north of Trujillo, Monfragüe National Park and River Almonte

6th February 2020: La Garganta and Caparra

7th February 2020: Madrigalejo, rice fields near Palazuelo and Santa Amalia, Alange

8th February 2020: Mérida

9th February 2020: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Alcollarín Reservoir, rice fields near Palazuelo.

10th February 2020: The cheesery at Casar de Cáceres, the Casar de Cáceres reservoir, Talaván and the Monroy road to Trujillo.

11th February 2020: Arrocampo Reservoir, Paprika Museum at Jaraiz.

12th February 2020: Return to Madrid via Belén Plains and Valdecañas Reservoir.

TRIP REPORT

3rd February 2020: Transfer from Madrid

We left Madrid at about 12:00, driving westwards towards Extremadura to progressively sunnier weather. We stopped for a hearty lunch at the Esparteras bar just outside Madrid and then continued with just a stop for coffee once we were across the border into Extremadura. **White Storks** and **Red Kites** were amongst several species seen as we made the journey. We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo late afternoon, but with enough time for John and Peter to enjoy a pre-dinner walk, seeing **Barn Swallow**, **Hawfinch** and **Iberian Magpies** amongst other species.

4th February 2020: Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Puerto Peña, Campo Lugar, Alcollarín and Sierra Brava.

We set off south-eastwards under a clear blue sky, but as we descended towards the rice fields near Madrigalejo we entered a persistent thick fog. This was the feature throughout the morning. Whilst offering some wonderfully atmospheric views of the **Common Cranes**, it did make it difficult to scan the wet muddy fields for other birds (that being said, we found **Blue-headed Wagtails**, **Water Pipits**, numerous **Hoopoes** and several waders). We sought respite at the gorge of Puerto Peña, but this too was full of fog. Coffee was taken at a friendly small bar in Obando and we had our picnic lunch close to Palazuelo. We enjoyed watching a throng of gulls and egrets (including **Great White Egret** which towered over the others) following a tractor.

It seemed that the misty conditions might persist through the afternoon, so we cut our losses and headed onto the plains near Campo Lugar. Here we found a wintering flock of **Stone Curlew** and on a small pool a nice range of duck and a colour-ringed adult **Spoonbill**. But this site was most memorable for the appearance of three **Long-eared Owls** out of the small one tress in which they were roosting. From there we went to the Alcollarín reservoir where there were thousands of dabbling duck (mainly **Shoveler**), as well as more egrets and herons, and all three species of local grebe (**Great Crested**, **Black-necked** and **Little**).

We ended the day at the Sierra Brava Reservoir where we had superb views of an **Eagle Owl**, whilst **Crag** and **House Martins** and **Barn Swallows** hawked insects overhead.

5th February 2020: Plains north of Trujillo, Monfragüe National Park and River Almonte

It was another fine, sunny day although with a fresh breeze in the latter part of the day. We stopped first on the plains north of Trujillo, seeing **Great Spotted Cuckoo** (a pair) on the way. We quite quickly found the over-wintering **Sociable Lapwing** and enjoyed excellent views of this rare visitor, although at times obstructed by Retinto cattle. Also present were wonderful numbers of small birds such as **Rock Sparrow**, **Spanish Sparrow**, **Calandra Lark**, **Skylark** and **Crested Lark**. From there we stopped at another area nearby finding a group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**.



From there we proceeded to the Monfragüe National Park with a stop at the north of the park where we found a newly emerged **Nettle-tree Butterfly** and fresh **Angel's Tears Narcissus**.



We enjoyed prolonged views of the pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, as well as a **Black Stork**, flocks of **Great Cormorant** and busy **Griffon Vultures**. We had our picnic near the Cardinal's Bridge, watching **Griffon Vultures**, **Red Kites** and a pair of **Bonelli's Eagle** displaying. Following a stop at the Salto de Gitano viewpoint, we had a guided visit of the rock paintings in the cave below the castle, which date back 9,500 years.



On our return to Trujillo, we had a pause at the River Almonte, where **Barn Swallows** and **Crag Martins** hawked insects and we had brief views of a **Golden Eagle**.

6th February 2020: La Garganta and Caparra

We enjoyed another fine day, with some freshness to the wind in the morning but calm, sunny and mild in the afternoon. We headed north-west, beyond Plasencia, through the Ambroz valley and rising to the Sierra de Bejar near La Garganta. Here we enjoyed a morning's walk through the spectacular mountain landscape: snow patches on the high ground, steep terraced valley sides and wonderful round granite boulders. In the patches of woodland we found a variety of birds including **Bullfinch**, **Girl Bunting**, **Coal Tit** as well as **Small Tortoiseshell** butterflies and memorably fields of **crocuses**. After our picnic, we saw the old wolf trap and snow well. After coffee we spent the rest of the afternoon at the Roman remains, notably the impressive archway at Caparra. Here **Thekla Larks** sang from the stonework, whilst **Common Cranes** fed in the nearby *dehesa*.

7th February 2020: Madrigalejo, rice fields near Palazuelo and Santa Amalia, Alange

It was a sunny day, although with some high cloud at times in the morning. We first went to some small gravel workings near Madrigalejo where Martin had found a wintering **Moustached Warbler** a few weeks ago. We spent 45 minutes there, hearing the warbler giving subsong, but it did not appear during that time. We then spent most of the morning on the rice fields near Palazuelo where we had some superb views of **Common Crane**, as well as **Spoonbill** and waders such as **Greenshank**. After coffee we stopped at Santa Amalia finding a huge flock of several thousand **Black-tailed**

Godwits spread across several fields. Two **Little Stint** were also present. Lunch was beside the dam at Alange where two **Black Wheatear** were seen and several **Crag Martins**. Then we stopped to look at **Giant Orchid** in flower before meeting with David Lindo who took us up the Jabata valley. There after a steep climb we came across an extraordinary colony of *Narcissus cantabricus*. It was absolutely stunning.



Golden Eagle, Thekla Lark, Black Wheatear and **Blue Rock Thrush** were amongst the birds seen. On our return we stopped again to watch the godwits this time in better light.

We had an evening meal in Trujillo.

8th February 2020: Mérida

The day dawned cool and misty and it remained largely overcast throughout, although with some late afternoon sunshine.

We spent the whole day in Mérida, the capital of Extremadura and as Emerita Augusta, the capital of the Roman province of Lusitania. And it was in the latter context the purpose of the visit, seeing the main sites in this World Heritage Site. These included the Roman Theatre and Amphitheatre, the Temple of Diana, the Forum, The Arab fort, with a great view across to the Roman Bridge, the Arch of Trajona and the hugely impressive Circus. We walked across the Roman Bridge, seeing roosting **Black-crowned Night Herons** and then to the beautiful Aqueduct of the Milagros, bestowed with **White Stork** nests, and close to which in a canal were **Water Pipit**, more than an dozen **Glossy Ibis, Grey Wagtails** and **Common Sandpipers**. On our return across the Roman Bridge we watched the gathering roost of **Cattle Egrets**, two **Little Bitterns** and two **Purple Swamphens**.

9th February 2020: Plains near Santa Marta de Magasca, Alcollarín Reservoir, rice fields near Palazuelo.

Rather overcast and cool for the first half of the day, but it became sunnier from midday onwards. We started on the plains west of Trujillo with excellent views of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** and a single **Little Bustard**. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** were also seen. We watched a fine **Merlin** on the ground and throngs of larks, gathering groups of **Lapwings** and **Golden Plover** were present. We stopped briefly at the Magasca River where **Woodlark** were singing and then after coffee in Sant Marta de Magsca, took the road south. There was not much activity there, so we elected to drive on to the Alcollarín reservoir for lunch. Here there were thousands of **Shoveler**, several **Spoonbill** and an otherwise wide selection of waterfowl. However, pride of place were the freshly opened **Hoop Petticoat Narcissus** and some brief sightings of **Western Dappled White** butterflies. **Marsh Harriers** displayed in the sunshine.



We spent the rest of the afternoon with the **Common Cranes** on the rice fields. There were larger numbers of flocking **Lapwings** and **Golden Plover** than on our previous visit, and groups of **Spotted Redshank**. On the wet fields there were large numbers of **White Wagtails**, with some **Yellow (Blue-headed) Wagtails** amongst them. We also found a first winter **Yellow-legged Gull**, easily overlooked with the large number of **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** present.

10th February 2020: The cheesery at Casar de Cáceres, the Casar de Cáceres reservoir, Talaván and the Monroy road to Trujillo.

It was a beautiful spring-like day with sunshine, blue skies, little or no wind and warmth. We drove west, passing Cáceres and heading to the small town of Casar de Cáceres. After a short stop to watch **Barn Swallows** and a **House Martin** collecting mud for

their nests, we arrived at the Doña Francisca cheesery. Here we enjoyed an excellent tour of the facilities, with Jorge (George) explaining to us the process for producing the world famous Torta de Casar cheese. Following the tour, we had the chance to sample ten different cheeses, ranging from soft goat's cheese to hard sheep's cheese. It was a fascinating and enjoyable tour.

We then stopped briefly for a walk beside the reservoir near the town, where there were a good show of sand crocuses.

We then drove north-east, crossing the River Almonte close to its confluence with the Tagus to arrive at the Talavan Reservoir. Here we had lunch and then walked, having frustrating views of the turbo-charged white butterflies (**Green-striped** and **Western Dappled**), but better views of **Small Copper** and **Clouded Yellow**. Birds included a displaying pair of **Marsh Harrier** and a high overhead **Spanish Imperial Eagle**. We returned to Trujillo along the Monroy road, crossing the Almonte again. We made a couple of stops, seeing flocks of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, **Hen Harrier**, **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and finished with a impressive show of hundreds of **Hoop Petticoat Narcissus**.

11th February 2020: Arrocampo Reservoir, Paprika Museum at Jaraiz de la Vera.

It was quite foggy as we neared Trujillo (where we saw a male **Lesser Kestrel** at the edge of town), but further on as we approached Arrocampo, it cleared and we had ideal conditions at the marsh there. We walked beside the marsh, having good views of **Purple Swamphen**, egrets, a roost of 11 **Black-crowned Night Herons** and small birds such as **Zitting Cisticola**.



Following coffee, and a small detour where we had great views of a **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, we headed north to the foothills of the Gredos Mountains, to the small town of Jaraiz de la Vera where we had a very interesting guided visit to the small paprika museum. We had our picnic close to the town, amidst bare winter Pyrenean Oak and beside a torrential stream.

We then returned to the area near Arrocampo, seeing **Black-winged Kite**, **Woodlark**, masses of sand crocuses and hordes of **Cattle Egrets**. Back at Trujillo we did some end-of-holiday shopping and were back in good time at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

12th February 2020: Return to Madrid via Belén Plains and Valdecañas Reservoir.

We bade our farewell to casa Rural El Recuerdo in thick fog. The poor visibility was a hindrance on the Belén Plains where we spent the first hour of the morning, although we did get a good view of a hunting male **Hen Harrier**. At every stop, despite the mist, we could hear **Calandra Larks** in song. We then moved onto the Valdecañas Reservoir where the light was somewhat better. Here we saw a female **Merlin** and distant groups of **Grey Lag Geese** and some **Common Shelduck**. A large number of **Barn Swallows** hawked over the water, whilst an even larger number of **Goldfinches** dominated a mixed species flock in the trees at the edge of the reservoir. We continued onto Madrid, stopping for coffee and some delicious food at one of the service stations. On the way we saw an **Iberian Green Woodpecker** fly across the motorway and a few **Red Kites**. **Lapwings** were much in evidence in their pre-migratory flocks.

We reached the airport as planned just before 14.00 with plenty of time to check-in.

List of species seen

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: Seen on migration near Trujillo on 11th February and also on Belén Plains and Valdecañas Reservoir on 12th.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on five days with newly hatched goslings at Charco Salado on 11th February,
3. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Valdecañas.
4. **Wigeon**: Seen on pools at Campo Lugar and at Alcollarín.
5. **Gadwall**: Seen at all reservoirs.
6. **Teal**: Seen on several days.
7. **Pintail**: Small numbers at Alcollarín.
8. **Mallard**: Seen every day.
9. **Shoveler**: Several thousand at Alcollarín Reservoir. Present at all reservoirs and most large pools.
10. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on two days.
11. **Little Grebe**: Seen on several days.
12. **Great Crested Grebe**: Present on all large water bodies.
13. **Black-necked Grebe**: Seen on both visits to Alcollarín Reservoir.
14. **Great Cormorant**: Seen daily.
15. **Little Bittern**: Seen from the Roman Bridge in Mérida.
16. **Cattle Egret**: Seen most days, especially on rice fields and Arrocampo.
17. **Black-crowned Night Heron**: Roosts at Mérida and Arrocampo.
18. **Little Egret**: Seen almost every day.
19. **Great White Egret**: Seen on several days.
20. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
21. **Black Stork**: Seen at Monfragüe National Park.

22. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
23. **Glossy Ibis:** About 15 seen in Mérida.
24. **Spoonbill:** A party at Alcollarín, also on rice fields.
25. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen most days.
26. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** Seen in Monfragüe National Park, near Santa Marta de Magasca and Talaván.
28. **Golden Eagle:** One seen at River Almonte and another near Alange.
29. **Bonelli's Eagle:** A pair seen in Monfragüe National Park.
30. **Red Kite:** Seen daily with over 20 seen some days.
31. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen almost every day.
32. **Hen Harrier:** Two seen on plains near Santa Marta de Magasca and one on Belén.
33. **Common Buzzard:** Seen daily.
34. **Black-winged Kite:** One at Arrocampo.
35. **Lesser Kestrel:** One seen on way from Madrid and another in Trujillo.
36. **Common Kestrel:** Seen almost daily.
37. **Merlin:** Seen on three days.
38. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo.
39. **Moorhen:** Seen on two days.
40. **Common Coot:** Seen on large water bodies.
41. **Common Crane:** Seen every day.
42. **Little Bustard:** Seen on the plains west of Trujillo.
43. **Great Bustard:** Seen on plains near Campo Lugar.
44. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on four days.
45. **Stone Curlew:** 19 seen near Campo Lugar.
46. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
47. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
48. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on rice fields.
49. **Golden Plover:** Seen on plains and on rice fields.
50. **Lapwing:** Seen daily in increasingly large flocks.
51. **Sociable Lapwing:** One seen on plains north of Trujillo on 5th February.
52. **Dunlin:** Seen on rice fields.
53. **Little Stint:** Seen on rice fields.
54. **Common Snipe:** Seen on three days.
55. **Common Curlew:** Seen on rice fields.
56. **Black-tailed Godwit:** Large numbers on rice fields near Santa Amalia.
57. **Spotted Redshank:** Seen on rice fields near Palazuelo.
58. **Greenshank:** Seen on rice fields.
59. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on several days.
60. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen on most days.
61. **Yellow-legged Gull:** One seen on rice fields near Palazuelo.
62. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen most days.
63. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen on most days.
64. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
65. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on every visit to the plains between Trujillo and Cáceres.
66. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
67. **Wood Pigeon:** Seen daily.
68. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.

69. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Seen on three days north of Trujillo and near Arrocampo.
70. **Eagle Owl:** Seen at Sierra Brava Reservoir.
71. **Little Owl:** Recorded every day.
72. **Long-eared Owl:** Three seen near Campo Lugar.
73. **Kingfisher:** Seen on three days.
74. **Hoopoe:** Seen daily.
75. **Iberian Green Woodpecker:** Heard at La Garganta and seen on way back to Madrid.
76. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen on one day.
77. **Monk Parakeet:** Seen in Madrid.
78. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
79. **Crested Lark:** Seen daily.
80. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost daily.
81. **Woodlark:** Seen on four days.
82. **Skylark:** Winter flocks on the plains and rice fields.
83. **Crag Martin:** Seen almost daily.
84. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
85. **House Martin:** Seen almost daily.
86. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
87. **Water Pipit:** Seen on rice fields.
88. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen most days.
89. **White Wagtail:** Seen daily.
90. **Yellow Wagtail:** Up to three seen on rice fields near Palazuelo.
91. **Wren:** Recorded almost daily.
92. **Dipper:** Seen at Jaraiz de la Vera.
93. **Dunnock:** Seen at La Garganta.
94. **Robin:** Seen daily.
95. **Bluethroat:** Seen on rice fields.
96. **Black Redstart:** Seen daily.
97. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
98. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Alange and Jabata Valley.
99. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Jabata Valley.
100. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
101. **Song Thrush:** Seen almost daily.
102. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen on three days.
103. **Cetti's warbler:** Seen on most days.
104. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen on several days.
105. **Moustached Warbler:** Heard singing near Madrigalejo.
106. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on three days.
107. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Blackcap:** Seen daily.
109. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen almost every day.
110. **Long-tailed Tit:** Recorded on three days.
111. **Crested Tit:** Recorded at La Garganta.
112. **Blue Tit:** Seen most days.
113. **Coal Tit:** Seen at La Garganta.
114. **Great Tit:** Seen daily.
115. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Calling on two days.
116. **Penduline Tit:** Seen in Mérida and Arrocampo.
117. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.

- 118. **Jay:** Seen at La Garganta.
- 119. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
- 120. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
- 121. **Jackdaw:** Seen most days.
- 122. **Carrion Crow:** Seen at La Garganta.
- 123. **Raven:** Seen most days.
- 124. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains.
- 125. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
- 126. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
- 127. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
- 128. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields.
- 129. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen on plains west of Trujillo.
- 130. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
- 131. **Common Waxbill:** Seen at Mérida, the rice fields and Arrocampo.
- 132. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
- 133. **Serin:** Seen on several days.
- 134. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
- 135. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost daily.
- 136. **Siskin:** Seen on two days.
- 137. **Linnet:** Seen most days.
- 138. **Crossbill:** Heard at La Garganta.
- 139. **Bullfinch:** Three seen at La Garganta.
- 140. **Hawfinch:** Seen on four days.
- 141. **Girl Bunting:** Seen on three days.
- 142. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at on two days.
- 143. **Reed Bunting:** Seen on rice fields and Arrocampo.
- 144. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Mammals

Rabbit

Reptiles and Amphibians

Natterjack Toad

Iberian Water Frog

Geniez's Wall Lizard

Guadarrama Wall Lizard

Red-striped Terrapin

Spanish Terrapin

Butterflies and Moths

Small White

Green-veined White

Western Dappled White

Clouded Yellow

Cleopatra

Brimstone

Small Copper

Holly Blue

Nettle-tree Butterfly

Large Tortoiseshell

Small Tortoiseshell

Painted Lady

Small Heath

Wall Brown

Hummingbird Hawk Moth

Other insects of interest

Violet Carpenter Bee

Interesting plants

Celery-leafed Buttercup

Spanish Milk Vetch

Angel's Tears Narcissus

Hoop Petticoat Narcissus

Narcissus cantabricus

Colchicum triphyllum

Romulea bulbocodium

Romulea clusiana

Giant Orchid

Friar's Cowl