

BIRDING EXTREMADURA AND CASA RURAL EL RECUERDO

AUTUMN HOLIDAY FOR JULIE AND GEOFF

6th – 15th September 2021



Itinerary

6th September 2021: Arrival in Madrid, visit to pool near Casatejada and Arrocampo Reservoir. Check-in at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

7th September 2021: Walk from Pago de San Clemente, then to Alcollarín Reservoir

8th September 2021: Plains west and north of Trujillo, Rivers Tamuja and Magasca

9th September 2021: Sierra Brava Reservoir, River Ruercas, Ricefields at Puebla de Alcollarín, Alcollarín Reservoir.

10th September 2021: The plains east of Cáceres, pools near Malpartida de Cáceres and the Parque de Principe, Cáceres.

11th September 2021: Rice fields near Vegas Altas, pool at Moheda Alta, Puerto Peña, Orellana Reservoir.

12th September 2021: Belén Plains, Carmonilla Reservoir, woodland near Garciaz

13th September 2021: Alcollarín Reservoir.

14th September 2021: Campo Lugar plains

15th September 2021: Return to Madrid

Trip Report

6th September 2021: Arrival in Madrid, visit to pools near Casatejada and Arrocampo Reservoir. Check-in at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

Martin collected Julie and Geoff from their hotel in Madrid just before 11.00. We got out of Madrid very quickly and headed south-west on the motorway towards Extremadura, under rather heavy cloud. That did not put off birds of prey and the holiday got off to a flying start with a fine juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, followed by **Short-toed Eagles**, **Booted Eagles** and **Red Kites**. Close to the Arrocampo reservoir we stopped for lunch at a bar, seeing another **Short-toed Eagle** from the terrace.

En route to our first stop we paused to watch a kettle of hundreds of migrating **White Storks**. Seeing birds on migration became a running theme of the whole holiday. We spent the afternoon first at a small gravel pit just north of Casatejada. Despite the rather cloudy and windy conditions, we saw no fewer than seven species of dragonfly, with **Violet Dropwings** being the most numerous. Butterflies included **Red-underwing Skipper**, **Brown Argus**, **Meadow Browns** and **Small Heaths**. A dark-phase **Booted Eagle** put in an appearance, soaring alongside two **Red Kites** and two **Common Buzzards**.

At Arrocampo, we saw more dragonflies, especially **Lesser Emperors** and **Long Skimmers**, clusters of **Willow Warblers** on passage, a **Purple Swamphen** and a beautiful **Purple Heron**.

We then continued the journey (seeing a couple of **Egyptian Vultures**) onward to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, arriving there at about 18.00, with time to freshen up before dinner.

7th September 2021: Walk from Pago de San Clemente, then to Alcollarín Reservoir

It was a fine morning to start with, with periods of cloud and a welcome fresh breeze. We set off just after 08.00 for a walk from the village to skirt the Sierra de los Lagares to the north and then to head across a belt of *dehesa* landscape. It was a lovely walk, with plenty of birds to keep us well entertained. These ranged from a good variety of passerine migrants, such as **Pied** and **Spotted Flycatchers**, **Common Redstarts**, **Common Whitethroats** and **Willow Warblers**, to flocks of **Bee-eaters**, **Woodchat Shrike** and **Booted Eagles** on their autumnal displays. There were wonderful encounters, such as with a pair of **Woodlark**. There were a few butterflies on the wing, such as **Cardinal**, **Gatekeeper**, **Southern Speckled Wood**, as well as some fine specimens of **Large Psammodromus** lizards.



Walk beside Sierra de los Lagares

Returning to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, we had coffee and biscuits by the pool and then headed southwards to Alcollarín Reservoir. We had lunch next to the small subsidiary water body. There was welcome shade here and also some excellent distractions in the form of dragonflies, most interestingly two male **Green Hooktails**, as well as **Lesser Emperors**, **Violet Dropwings** and **Northern Banded Groundlings**. Butterflies included the **African Grass Blues**. **Booted Eagles** entertained us, as they had done the morning. At the edge of the pool, a range of waders included a **Black-tailed Godwit**, several **Ruff** and a **Wood Sandpiper**.



Green Hooktail

Stopping briefly at the dam of the main reservoir as we left, four **Black Terns** were watched hawking over the water.

8th September 2021: Plains west and north of Trujillo, Rivers Tamuja and Magasca



The plains: looking barren, but in fact full of birds

We had an early start in order to be on the plains west of Trujillo at dawn. It was an overcast morning, quite cool and offering superb conditions to enjoy the birding in this open landscape. The fields looked barren at first glance, but in fact the variety and above all sheer numbers of birds were superb. We quickly found two **Great Bustards** and then, from a viewpoint, obtained wonderful views of both **Pin-tailed** and **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. Migrant birds were present all around us: **Tawny Pipits**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Willow Warbler**, **Whinchat** and **Northern Wheatear**, including a stunning male Greenland form.

We were also fortunate to find a group of eight **Little Bustards**. Perhaps the most surprising of all was a **Kingfisher**, flying low over the plains from one small waterhole to another. A migrating flock of **Black Stork** were also a wonderful sight.

After a welcome coffee stop, we stopped for an hour overlooking the River Tamuja. Here we were rewarded by superb views of **Short-toed Eagles**, as well as hirundines like **Crag Martins** and **Red-rumped Swallows**. **Green Sandpiper** and **Little Ringed Plover** were also present. North of the village of Santa Marta de Magsaca is the River Magasca and here we had our sandwiches. **Short-toed Eagles** were also present here. We completed the afternoon with a walk on the plains north of Trujillo. Julie spotted a **Little Bustard** at very close range and we detected a further two in the tall vegetation nearby – how many others were there? Close flybys of **Black Vultures** were excellent. One interesting find was a huge robber fly: **Asilus barbarus**.



Asilus barbarus

Returning to Trujillo, **Woodchat Shrike** and **Marsh Harrier** was also seen.

9th September 2021: Sierra Brava Reservoir, River Ruercas, Ricefields at Puebla de Alcollarín, Alcollarín Reservoir.

It was overcast for most of the morning, with more sunshine in the afternoon. We stopped first at the Sierra Brava reservoir where we were treated with prolonged and magnificent views of an **Eagle Owl** at its roost. At times a **Red Avadavat** and a **Common Waxbill** ventured in to collect down from the scattered feathers of what had belonged some egret at the entrance of the roost site. The owl's massive "paws" were quite stunning to see!

From there we stopped beside the River Ruercas, a stretch of gallery woodland and riverine vegetation teeming with warblers, especially **Garden Warblers**. We were delighted to find a **Wryneck** there. A **Little Bittern** was seen briefly in flight.

After a stop for coffee, we spent an hour or so on the rice fields, enjoying a displaying **Yellow-crowned Bishop**, as well as some verge side butterflies such as **Clouded Yellows** and **Long-tailed Blues**. Parties of **Bee-eaters** hawked high in the sky, perhaps on **Red-veined Darters** which were in their hundreds all round us.

We complete the day with a stop at the Alcollarín Reservoir. A vast raft of **Little Grebe** contained two fine **Black-necked Grebes** and it was good to watch them in close

proximity together. Amongst a throng of **Spoonbills** were four **Black Stork**. On the water's edge were waders such as **Ruff** and **Spotted Redshank**, whilst Julie spotted a **Black Tern** circling high above us, later to descend and behave far more in keeping, as it hawked over the water.

In the evening, Geoff and Julie watched a **Tawny Owl** hunting at the edge of the village.

10th September 2021: The plains east of Cáceres, pools near Malpartida de Cáceres and the Parque de Principe, Cáceres.

It was a day with scattered cloud and much milder temperatures, helped by a cooling westerly breeze. We spent the first part of the morning on the plains to the east of Cáceres. It was an amazingly productive couple of hours. We saw no fewer than three adult **Spanish Imperial Eagles**, a juvenile **Bonelli's Eagle**, two juvenile **Montagu's Harriers** and a male **Hen Harrier**. The presence of the raptors indicated only one thing: plenty of prey and indeed the abundance of small birds (**Calandra Larks**, **Corn Buntings** and **Spanish Sparrows**) was extraordinary, as were the number of migrants in the fields: **Tawny Pipits**, **Northern Wheatears** and groups of **Greater Short-toed Larks**. The denizens of the plains were also present in the form of **Great Bustard** and both species of sandgrouse.

As we headed to coffee we had superb views of a large **Ocellated Lizard**.

Following the break, we took the northern part of the Cáceres ring road and then stopped at a couple of pools in the dry, granite landscape near Malpartida de Cáceres. Here we found no fewer than eleven species of odonates, including **Southern Darter** and **Green Hooktail**.



Orange-winged Dropwing

In the afternoon we enjoyed a walk in the Parque de Principe in the centre of the city of Cáceres. Here we had good views of birds like **Hawfinch**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Iberian Magpie** and **Hoopoes**. Pride of place however were six or seven **Orange-winged Dropwings**, all males, holding little territories around an ornamental fountain.

The afternoon concluded with drinks in a pavement café beside the main square in Trujillo.

At dusk, a **Red-necked Nightjar** was seen well flying low over the garden.

11th September 2021: Rice fields near Vegas Altas, pool at Moheda Alta, Puerto Peña, Orellana Reservoir.

It was another sunny day, with some cloud cover at times, but getting hot by late afternoon. We headed south, to spend the first half of the morning in the rice fields near the village of Vegas Altas. An autumn flock of **Stone Curlew** heralded our presence from a fallow field where **Great Bustards** also strode. Nearer to us, we got great views of **Quail** on the ground, as well as **Glossy Ibis**, breeding plumage **Red Avadavats**, and a passing **Montagu's Harrier**.

After coffee in the little rice-farmers' village of Obando, we stopped at an embanked pool at Moheda Alta where a fine variety of birds kept us busy. These included an endearing group of five **Black Tern**, four **Greater Flamingo**, raucous **Greenshank**, **Dunlin** and duck including **Pintail** and **Common Pochard**.



Puerto Peña

On the way to our lunch stop, we saw an **Egyptian Mongoose** cross the road in front of us. We stopped at the fine viewpoint at Puerto Peña, watching many **Griffon Vultures** wheeling overhead and in front of the impressive cliff and we were teased by an elusive **Blue Rock Thrush**.

We completed the afternoon with a walk along the bank of the Orellana Reservoir near the village of Casas de Don Pedro. There were a good variety of dragonflies present, including **Epaulet** and **Long Skimmers** and **Violet Dropwings**.

12th September 2021: Belén Plains, Carmonilla Reservoir, woodland near Garciaz

It was another memorable day, again wall-to-wall sunshine and feeling quite hot. We spent the first half of the morning enjoying the almost 360° view from an area of high ground on the Belén Plains. It was a wonderful way to bird, watching birds as they appeared across this seemingly bleak terrain, bleached blond by the summer heat. **Great Bustards** were seen walking and in flight, on one occasion a **Red Fox** passing within a short distance. **Montagu's Harriers** swept across the fields. **Whinchats** and **Northern Wheatears** perched on wires.

After excellent coffee in Torrecillas de la Tiesa, we entered the plains again, this time to visit a small reservoir. Despite (or because of) the late morning heat, looking skywards was very productive with birds riding the thermals. At one time 18 **Black Stork** and a **Golden Eagle** shared the sky, **Black** and **Griffon Vultures** drifted over close by, we also saw Booted Eagle and a distant Peregrine. At the reservoir itself there were a small group of **Yellow Wagtails**, and a small selection of waders, including **Greenshank**, **Green Sandpiper** and **Common Sandpiper**.



Two-tailed Pasha

We then headed to seek respite from the heat to the mixed woodland above the village of Garciaz. Here we had our picnic and set immediately to phototroph and simply admire several pristine **Two-tailed Pashas**. Other butterflies included **Oriental Meadow Brown**, **Sooty Copper** and several **Cardinals** (a total of 17 species were seen during the day). **Western Emerald Spreadwings** were also in good numbers in shady areas along the path, whilst birds included **Hawfinch** and **Long-tailed Tit**. We also found the gorgeous little flower, the **Autumn Snowflake**.

13th September 2021: Alcollarín Reservoir.

There was a dramatic change in the weather, with a day considerable cooler, more overcast and with several light showers of rain. We stopped first at the pool outside the small town of Zorita. Here we clocked up no fewer than 20 species in five minutes, with birds like **Little Grebe**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Common Snipe**, **Short-toed Eagle**, **Willow Warblers** and **Whinchats**.

Then we spent the whole day at the Alcollarín Reservoir, with just a short departure for coffee late morning. As we arrived fast-flying parties of **Pintail** were heading in the direction of the water, but we could not subsequently relocate them, presumably they had been passing through.

It was yet another day dominated by birds on migration. Over a thousand **House Martins** paused to rest on the great dam wall. On the shore of the lake there were waders like **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Little Stint**. Geoff found a **Kentish Plover**. At the edge of woodland, a delightful small group of **Turtle Dove**. We had prolonged views of a **Wryneck** feeding on the ground and another was heard. A group of **Black Stork** rested on a dead tree. Against dark clouds a small group of **Alpine Swift** appeared out of nowhere. And everywhere, **Willow Warblers**, **Northern Wheatears**, **Common Redstarts** and **Pied Flycatchers**.

14th September 2021: Campo Lugar plains



Rain front crossing the plains

It was a very wet day, rather windy and heavily overcast, with some heavy downpours of rain, especially in the afternoon. Along the side of the main road south of Zorita, we stopped to watch a party of **Lesser Kestrels** (about a dozen), perched on the wires and then feeding as a group over the fields.

We then devoted the rest of day on Campo Lugar plains with two coffee stops in Campo Lugar village. The skies were very impressive, with the dramatic front of heavy rain marching across the landscape. But despite the challenging conditions, we had some excellent wildlife encounters. A large group of **Great Bustards** together with **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** (with some wonderful views of the latter in flight), parties of newly arrived **Northern Lapwings**, foraging **Montagu's Harriers**, amazing flocks of **Calandra Larks** and **Corn Bunting**.

We found a huge flock of **Egyptian Geese** (over 400 individuals) feeding on stubble, which was so impressive that it even caused two motorists to stop and take photos with their mobiles! The flock included a **Ruddy Shelduck** and **Mallard**, whilst **Great Bustards** strode past and a **Montagu's Harrier** glided over.

During a pause between showers, we watched two male **Lesser Kestrels**, extremely bedraggled, preening and catching prey.

15th September 2021: Return to Madrid

We left Casa Rural El Recuerdo at 09.00 to the sound of **Woodlark** song and **Hawfinch** calls. It was an easy run back to Madrid with a stop for coffee once we had gotten through a belt of torrential rain. The damp weather reduced the number of birds of prey on the wing, although we did see two **Griffon Vultures** perched on a pylon.

Species seen

It had been an extremely enjoyable and productive trip. We did not set out to maximise lists, instead focusing on looking for particular species and simply exploring at depth. Nevertheless, for an early/mid September visit we were delighted with the results: 24 species of butterfly, 16 species of dragonfly and damselfly, 149 species of birds, and some very classy other wildlife too.

Birds

	06-sep	07-sep	08-sep	09-sep	10-sep	11-sep	12-sep	13-sep	14-sep	15-sep
Egyptian Goose				x		x		x	x	
Grey Lag Goose		x						x		
Ruddy Shelduck									x	
Mallard	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Shoveler		x		x		x		x	x	
Pintail						x		x	x	
Gadwall		x		x				x	x	
Teal		x		x		x		x	x	

Pochard						x		x		
Quail						x				
Little Grebe	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	
Black-necked Grebe				x				x		
Great Crested Grebe		x		x		x		x		
Greater Flamingo						x				
Little Bittern	x			x						
Cattle Egret	x			x				x	x	
Little Egret		x		x			x	x	x	
Great Egret		x		x	x	x		x	x	
Grey Heron	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Purple Heron	x									
Black Stork			x	x	x		x	x		
White Stork	x			x		x				
Glossy Ibis						x				
Spoonbill		x		x				x		
Cormorant	x	x		x		x	x	x		
Egyptian Vulture	x									
Griffon Vulture	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Black Vulture	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Spanish Imperial Eagle	x				x					
Golden Eagle							x	x		
Short-toed Eagle	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		
Booted Eagle	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		
Bonelli's Eagle					x					
Red Kite	x		x		x		x			
Marsh Harrier	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	
Montagu's Harrier					x	x	x		x	
Hen Harrier					x					
Common Buzzard	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Lesser Kestrel									x	
Common Kestrel	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	
Moorhen	x			x				x		
Western Swampphen	x									
Common Coot		x				x		x		
Water Rail	x				x					
Great Bustard			x		x	x	x		x	
Little Bustard			x							
Black-winged Stilt		x		x		x	x	x	x	
Stone Curlew						x			x	
Little Ringed Plover		x	x	x		x	x	x		
Kentish Plover				x				x		
Ringed Plover			x	x				x		
Northern Lapwing		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Black-tailed Godwit	x	x	x							
Green Sandpiper		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Common Sandpiper		x		x			x	x		
Ruff		x		x				x		
Wood Sandpiper		x								
Spotted Redshank				x						
Greenshank		x				x	x	x		
Dunlin						x				

Curlew Sandpiper								x		
Little Stint								x		
Black-headed Gull		x		x		x		x	x	
Lesser Black-backed Gull						x				
Black Tern			x	x		x				
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse			x		x					
Black-bellied Sandgrouse			x		x		x		x	
Stock Dove			x							
Wood Pigeon	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Collared Dove	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Turtle Dove								x		
Feral Dove	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	
Little Owl			x	x	x	x	x		x	
Tawny Owl			x							
Eagle Owl				x						
Alpine Swift								x		
Common Swift			x			x	x			
Pallid Swift		x	x							
Red-necked Nightjar				x	x					
Kingfisher		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Bee-eater		x	x	x		x				
Hoopoe				x	x	x	x	x	x	
Wryneck				x				x		
Great Spotted Woodpecker					x	x	x			
Calandra Lark			x		x	x	x		x	
Crested Lark		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Thekla Lark		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Woodlark		x	x							x
Short-toed Lark					x		x		x	
Sand Martin			x	x		x	x	x	x	
Crag Martin	x	x	x	x		x			x	
Barn Swallow	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Red-rumped Swallow		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
House Martin				x		x	x	x		
Tawny Pipit			x		x		x			
Yellow Wagtail			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Grey Wagtail		x		x	x					
White Wagtail			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Wren				x			x			
Robin							x			
Black Redstart		x								
Common Redstart	x	x	x					x		
Stonechat	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Whinchat			x	x	x		x	x	x	
Northern Wheatear		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Black-eared Wheatear				x						
Blackbird	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Cetti's Warbler	x		x	x	x	x		x		
Zitting Cisticola	x			x		x		x		
Sedge Warbler	x			x		x				
Reed Warbler	x			x		x		x		
Melodious Warbler		x								

Sardinian Warbler	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		
Common Whitethroat		x		x				x		
Garden Warbler		x		x						
Blackcap							x			
Willow Warbler	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		
Firecrest										
Pied Flycatcher		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Spotted Flycatcher		x		x			x	x		
Long-tailed Tit		x					x			
Crested Tit							x			
Blue Tit	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Great Tit		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Nuthatch						x	x			
Short-toed Treecreeper					x		x			
Iberian Grey Shrike	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Woodchat Shrike		x	x	x					x	
Jay							x			
Iberian Magpie	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Common Magpie	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Jackdaw	x			x	x	x		x		
Raven		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Spotless Starling	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
House Sparrow	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Spanish Sparrow	x			x	x	x		x		
Tree Sparrow				x		x				
Yellow-crowned Bishop				x		x				
Common Waxbill		x	x	x		x		x		
Red Avadavat				x		x				
Chaffinch		x			x	x	x			
Serin		x			x					
Greenfinch		x		x	x					
Goldfinch		x		x	x		x	x		
Linnet		x						x		
Hawfinch					x		x	x		x
Cirl Bunting			x							
Corn Bunting		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

Butterflies

	06-sep	07-sep	08-sep	09-sep	10-sep	11-sep	12-sep	13-sep
Swallowtail			x				x	
Small White		x		x	x			
Bath White					x		x	x
Clouded Yellow				x			x	
Purple Hairstreak							x	
Small Copper		x	x			x	x	
Sooty Copper							x	
Long-tailed Blue				x	x			
Lang's Short-tailed Blue		x					x	

Holly Blue			x				x	
Brown Argus	x	x	x			x	x	x
Common Blue				x				
African Grass Blue		x		x	x			
Two-tailed Pasha						x	x	
Cardinal		x			x		x	
Great Banded Grayling						x	x	
Meadow Brown	x	x	x			x	x	x
Oriental Meadow Brown							x	
Gatekeeper		x						
Southern Gatekeeper						x	x	
Small Heath	x	x				x	x	x
Speckled Wood		x			x			
Wall Brown							x	
Red-underwing Skipper	x	x						

Dragonflies and damselflies

	06-sep	07-sep	08-sep	09-sep	10-sep	11-sep	12-sep	13-sep
Migrant Spreadwing					x			
Western Willow Spreadwing							x	
Blue-eye					x			
Iberian Bluetail	x	x		x	x	x		x
Blue Emperor				x	x	x		
Lesser Emperor	x	x		x	x	x	x	
Green Hooktail		x			x			x
Northern Banded Groundling	x	x				x		x
Broad Scarlet	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Epaulet Skimmer		x		x		x		
Long Skimmer	x				x	x		
Red-veined Darter	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Southern Darter					x			
Common Darter							x	
Violet Dropwing	x	x			x	x		
Orange-winged Dropwing					x			

Other Wildlife

A large robber fly: *Asilus barbarus*

Hummingbird Hawk Moth

An Antlion

European Praying Mantis

Great Capricorn Beetle

Ocellated Lizard

Large Psammodromus

Moorish Gecko

Iberian Water Frog

Red Fox

Egyptian Mongoose