

HOLIDAY REPORT FOR CYRIL AND JANET
Casa Rural El Recuerdo & Birding Extremadura
3rd – 12th February 2022



Itinerary

3rd February 2022: Transfer from Madrid

4th February 2022: Sierra Brava reservoir and rice fields near Madrigalejo

5th February 2022: Prosperina Reservoir and Alange

6th February 2022: Rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín and Madrigalejo, Sierra Brava Reservoir

7th February 2022: Plains and river valleys near Santa Marta de Magasca

8th February 2022: Plains of Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir

9th February 2022: Villuercas Mountains

10th February 2022: Arrocampo and Monfragüe National Park

11th February 2022: Rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín and Madrigalejo, Sierra Brava Reservoir

12th February 2022: Return to Madrid with stop at Valdecañas Reservoir.

Tour Report

3rd February 2022: Transfer from Madrid

Cyril and Janet arrived in time at Terminal 4 Madrid airport and by mid-afternoon we were heading around the rather busy ring road of southern Madrid, to then head south-west in the direction of Extremadura. It was a lovely afternoon, the low afternoon sunshine drawing out the colour of almond blossom. We saw numerous **Red Kite** on the way, as well as a **Griffon Vulture**, **White Storks**, several **Buzzards** and **Common Kestrels**. We arrived at Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 6.30. It was still light enough to appreciate the wonderful blossom in the garden.

4th February 2022: Sierra Brava reservoir and rice fields near Madrigalejo

After a very relaxing night's sleep, we set off following breakfast to explore the nearby habitats to the south. As we drive through the village **Barn Swallows** were singing on the wires. Our first stop was at the Sierra Brava reservoir where we had lovely views of a pair of **Eagle Owls**, sitting out in the morning hazy sunshine. On the reservoir itself, apart from an incredible 100+ **Common Shelduck**, there were few birds, but **Crag Martins** and **Barn Swallows** thronged around us.



Common Cranes (adults and juveniles)

We then spent the rest of the day on the rice fields, where **Common Cranes** were in seemingly every direction. A strong supporting role were the large numbers of **Spanish Sparrows**, often joined by dozens of **Tree Sparrows** in beautiful mixed flocks. **Hoopoes** were also frequently seen and just as we left our first area we had a close

view of a **Black-winged Kite**. We had coffee at Madrigalejo and then stopped beside the River Ruercas where **Common Chiffchaffs** were busy foraging for insects. Back on the rice fields we started finding groups of waders: **Ruff**, **Dunlin**, **Kentish Plover**, **Avocet** and **Golden Plover**.

We also found twice tractors working mashing-up the rice stubble to create an ooze that offered a banquet for hundreds of gulls, as well as **Cattle Egrets**, **Little Egrets**, **Great Egrets**, **Grey Herons**, **White Storks** and **White Wagtails**. Amongst the latter we also found **Yellow Wagtail** and **Water Pipits**. Towards the end of the afternoon, we enjoyed a flock of **Black-tailed Godwits**, increasing in size as small numbers kept dropping in. At a final *rendez-vous* with a tractor, we had extraordinary views of several **Jack Snipe** coming to land on open ground close to where we were parked. Truly wonderful.



Jack Snipe

5th February 2022: Prosperina Reservoir and Alange

The day dawned bright and cloudless at Pago de San Clemente, but not far along our journey towards Mérida we entered thick banks of fog. This persisted right through to our destination; the reservoir of Prosperina just north of Mérida. The dam was built by the Romans and the reservoir provided water which was moved by channels onto the line of aqueducts which fed the city. As we slowly walked the length of the dam, the fog started to clear and we could enjoy, although with large members of the local public, the scenic surroundings. **Barn Swallows**, **Crag Martins** and **House Martins** fed over the water. A **Kingfisher** was seen a couple of occasions. We had lovely views of **Serin** and **Black Redstart**.



Almond blossom at Alange

After coffee nearby we repaired to the modern dam of Alange, creating one of Extremadura's largest modern reservoirs. On the way, crossing the Guadiana River, we saw an **Osprey** flapping slowly over high over the water. We took a lovely walk, now in blazing sunshine, beside the water, with rocky outcrops towering above us. We found the bird we were hoping for, a fine male **Black Wheatear**, and we also had good views of **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Thekla Lark**, **Spanish Sparrow**, **Black Redstart**, as well as **Griffon Vultures** gliding overhead. Perhaps the star though was a **Swallowtail** butterfly, one of seven species that we saw on the wing.



Swallowtail

6th February 2022: Rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín and Madrigalejo, Sierra Brava Reservoir

Another glorious morning: sunshine and not a breath of wind. We decided to return to the rice fields and started in the area where we concluded the day on 4th February. Here we found quite quickly a magnificent flock of about a thousand **Black-tailed Godwits**. It was just a couple of fields away that we located a **Sociable Lapwing** as it was flying with some Lapwings and then landed in a field beside us. We watched this Central Asian rarity at length, as it preened and rested. Extremadura is probably one of the best places in Western Europe to see this Globally Threatened species.



Sociable Lapwing

After a celebratory coffee, we moved to some fields just to the north, where there was an extraordinary flock of perhaps three thousand **Dunlin**. We found small flocks of **Little Stint** and birds like **Ringed** and **Kentish Plovers**. However, best of all was a **Bluethroat**, or rather three **Bluethroats** that were disputing a choice corner of a muddy field.

We moved east for lunch beside the Gargaligas River, where **Chiffchaffs** foraged insects and we had glimpses of a couple of **Bramblings**. Returning to the rice fields, we had lengthy views of a hovering **Black-winged Kite** and enjoyed watching **Common Cranes** at close quarters. Just a short distance away strode two **Great Bustards** and a flock of about 40 **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**.

We then headed north towards the Sierra Brava Reservoir, stopping to watch more **Common Cranes** and **Water Pipits**. We were delighted to find a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and afterwards saw it being chased by a **Common Magpie**. A final stop to look at the Sierra Brava Reservoir yielded the flock of over 100 **Common Shelduck** as well as large numbers of dabbling duck: **Pintail**, **Wigeon** and **Shoveler** amongst them.

7th February 2022: Plains and river valleys near Santa Marta de Magasca

With the weather similar to that of yesterday we headed towards the open plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, with the village of Santa Marta de Magasca acting as the pivotal point. Starting close to Cáceres, we had good views of **Calandra Larks**, a **Little Owl** and also rather distant **Black-bellied** and **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. **Lapwings** were spread across almost all the vast fields. As we left the first area, we came across a group of 40 **Great Bustards**, resting and preening in a slight hollow in the land making them impossible to see, despite their proximity, from all but one point along the road.

Stopping at the River Tamuja, we watched **Crag Martins** feeding busily whilst a flock of over fifteen **Hawfinch** flew overhead, calling. After coffee in the delightful village of Santa Marta de Magasca, where it was market day, and the sunny square was full of stalls and villagers going about their business. We returned to the River Tamuja where a **Thekla Lark** was in song above us. North of the village, we had our sandwiches beside the Magasca River. **Chiffchaffs** and **Blackcaps** were numerous along its banks. A **Black Vulture** glided silently overhead.

Back on the plains, we watched more **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** and saw a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle** gliding over the fields. We ended the afternoon on the plains due west of Trujillo. Here we had superb views of more sandgrouse, and a fly past of over 275 **Stock Doves**, which was an impressive sight. Another **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was seen, this time being mobbed by several **Red Kite**. As we headed home, we were delighted to find a group of 20 **Little Bustards**, a fitting and superb way to complete the day.

8th February 2022: Plains of Campo Lugar and Alcollarín Reservoir



Little Bustards

It was yet another day of cloudless skies and with a morning breeze which eased off during the day. We spent the first part of the day on the plains near the village of Campo Lugar. **Calandra Larks** were full of song and there were parties of Common

Starlings everywhere. We found a group of **Little Bustard** and then later a party of **Great Bustard**. A **Peregrine** was watched as it preened on a stone in a field. We were delighted with some superb sightings of **Great Spotted Cuckoo** and, at the same time, amazingly, **two Long-eared Owls**. What a stop!



Great Spotted Cuckoo

After an excellent coffee stop as well, we ventured onto the Alcollarín Reservoir where we spent almost the rest of the day. As we arrived, we had magnificent views of a **Black-winged Kite**, the first ever recorded at the site. But the lasting impression of this site in winter is the sheer number of waterfowl. Thousands of dabbling duck: mainly **Shoveler** and **Teal**, but also big numbers of **Wigeon** and **Mallard**. We found a single male **Garganey** amidst the throng. There were also large numbers of grebes, including several **Black-necked Grebes**. A strong supporting cast included four **Black Stork** and double figures of **Spoonbill**. We watched a group of **Common Cranes** taking to the thermals as they started their northward migration.



Black-winged Kite

At the end of the afternoon, we returned to Campo Lugar to find four **Stone Curlew** close to the village.

9th February 2022: Villuercas Mountains



Picnic site, Villuercas

Not a cloud in the sky and not a breath of wind, so a perfect day to head east to the spectacular landscape of the Villuercas Mountains, near the historic town of Guadalupe. We stopped first beside the River Ruercas where we watched a **Dipper** carrying nest material and saw a **Bonelli's Eagle** fly overhead. Following that we made a couple of stops on the wooded hillsides overlooking Guadalupe, its monastery looking splendid in the sunshine. **Woodlark** sang beautifully at both locations. Following coffee we made a slow ascent of the highest peak of the Villuercas, stopping to look at a medieval ice house and also to admire the Appalachian relief of the mountains. **Crag Martins** flocked around the peak itself. In the afternoon, we followed a couple of valleys in the mountains, with great views of **Bonelli's Eagle**, **Peregrine** and numerous **Griffon Vultures**. We completed the day with a picturesque drive back via Garciaz.



Watching Bonelli's Eagle

10th February 2022: Arrocampo and Monfragüe National Park

We headed off after breakfast north-east, to the Arrocampo Reservoir. There were thick belts of fog as we approached, but fortunately as we settled down in the hide, the mist rose. It was initially rather quiet, although we saw **Purple Swamphen** and had good views of **Zitting Cisticola**, but by the end of our visit we had enjoyed excellent views of **Black-crowned Night Heron**, more **Purple Swamphens**, **Kingfishers**, **Cetti's Warblers** and even a glimpse of a **Little Bittern**. As we had our late morning coffee, **Barn Swallows** and **House Martins** hawked insects above us.

Onward to the Monfragüe National Park, where at our first stop we had superb views of a **Golden Eagle** and a **Bonelli's Eagle**, within just a few minutes of each other. **Griffon Vultures** were nesting on the rock face in front of us, whilst **Great Cormorants** were busy fishing in the Tiétar River below.

We had lunch amongst pines, where a **Crested Tit** gave us good views. During afternoon stops, we got fine views of a **Hawfinch**, as well as seeing large numbers of **Blackcaps** feeding on the wild olives. At our last stop, opposite the Peña Falcon rockface, where dozens of **Griffon Vultures** were present, we watched **Black Redstart** and **Serin** at close range.



Monfragüe National Park

A brief stop in Trujillo yielded three newly arrived **Lesser Kestrels**, including an obliging male perched several times on the old building in front of us.

11th February 2022: Rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín and Madrigalejo, Sierra Brava Reservoir

It was a day of glorious weather (positively spring-like) and we saw lots of birds! We elected to return to the rice fields and explored first the area south of Puebla de Alcollarín where we relocated the **Sociable Lapwing**. It was almost like being reunited with an old friend! There were also good numbers again of **Black-tailed Godwits**, and vast flocks of **Dunlin**. After coffee, we slowly made our way through the rice fields eastwards. An amazing selection of waders were present, including good numbers of **Kentish Plover** and more **Black-tailed Godwits**. We found a tractor working the rice fields and we enjoyed a long stay to watch the throngs of egrets and gulls taking advantage of the pickings and remarkably staying spotlessly clean!

At lunch beside the River Ruercas, we were captivated by the antics of the foraging Chiffchaffs, whilst thermals of **Common Cranes** and **White Storks** circled above us.

South of Madrigalejo we had an excellent afternoon, more waders, but also a flock of about 70 **Glossy Ibis**, a fine **Yellow Wagtail** and large numbers of **Spanish Sparrow** and **Red Avadavats**. There were also still hundreds of **Common Cranes** present.

We concluded our afternoon at the Sierra Brava reservoir where the highlight was a vast raft of over two thousand **Pintail**. These were passage birds on their way north from West Africa and pausing just for a few days in Extremadura.

12th February 2022: Return to Madrid with stop at Valdecañas Reservoir.

A more overcast day greeted our departure from Casa Rural El Recuerdo, as did groups of **Iberian Magpies**. We took the motorway back towards Madrid, seeing **Griffon Vultures** resting on a pylon, several **Red Kites** and the beauty of family groups of **Common Cranes** feeding on acorns in the holm oak *dehesas*. We stopped at the vast Valdecañas Reservoir where a group of **Kentish Plover** and **Dunlin** foraged on the shore and there were a variety of ducks present: **Common Shelduck**, **Teal**, **Wigeon** and **Shoveler** mainly.

After a stop for coffee, we then proceeded onto the airport, without problems with traffic. **Monk Parakeets** and an **Iberian Green Woodpecker** crossed our path. We arrived just ahead of our ETA and with plenty of time to check-in.

List of Species seen:

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: A small number still present at Sierra Brava reservoir.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on several days on reservoirs.
3. **Common Shelduck**: Over a hundred at Sierra Brava, also seen on rice fields and at Valdecañas.
4. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín, Sierra Brava and Valdecañas.
5. **Gadwall**: Seen on five days.
6. **Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín, Sierra Brava and Valdecañas.
7. **Pintail**: A huge flock present at Sierra Brava on 11th February.
8. **Mallard**: Seen most days.
9. **Garganey**: A male present at Alcollarín.
10. **Shoveler**: Seen most days, huge numbers at Alcollarín.
11. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on three days.
12. **Little Grebe**: Seen most days.
13. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen on most days.
14. **Black-necked Grebe**: Present at Alcollarín.
15. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost every day.
16. **Little Bittern**: One at Arrocampo.
17. **Cattle Egret**: Seen most days and in large numbers on the rice fields.
18. **Little Egret**: Seen most days.
19. **Great White Egret**: Seen most days.
20. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost daily.
21. **Black Stork**: Seen at Alcollarín.
22. **White Stork**: Seen every day.
23. **Glossy Ibis**: About 70 on rice fields on 11th February.
24. **Spoonbill**: Seen on four days.
25. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
26. **Black Vulture**: Seen on the plains and in Monfragüe.
27. **Osprey**: One flying over Mérida on 5th February.
28. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Seen on the plains.
29. **Golden Eagle**: One seen at Monfragüe.
30. **Bonelli's Eagle**: Two seen in Villuercas Mountains and one in Monfragüe.
31. **Red Kite**: Common and seen daily.
32. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost every day.
33. **Hen Harrier**: Seen on the rice fields on 4th February.
34. **Common Buzzard**: Seen daily.

35. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen on two days.
36. **Black-winged Kite**: Seen on three days and with excellent views.
37. **Lesser Kestrel**: Three in Trujillo on 10th February.
38. **Common Kestrel**: Seen daily.
39. **Merlin**: One on rice fields on 4th February.
40. **Peregrine Falcon**: Seen in Villuercas Mountains and Campo Lugar plains.
41. **Water Rail**: Heard on several days.
42. **Moorhen**: Seen almost daily.
43. **Purple Swamphen**: Seen at Arrocampo.
44. **Common Coot**: Seen on three days.
45. **Common Crane**: Seen every day and in large numbers on the rice fields.
46. **Little Bustard**: Flocks on plains west of Trujillo and at Campo Lugar.
47. **Great Bustard**: Flocks on plains near Cáceres and at Campo Lugar.
48. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen most days.
49. **Avocet**: Seen on rice fields on 4th February.
50. **Stone Curlew**: Seen at Campo Lugar.
51. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen on rice fields.
52. **Ringed Plover**: Seen on rice fields.
53. **Kentish Plover**: Seen on rice fields and at Valdecañas Reservoir.
54. **Golden Plover**: Seen on plains and on rice fields.
55. **Lapwing**: Seen daily, common and widespread.
56. **Sociable Lapwing**: One seen on rice fields on 6th and 11th February.
57. **Dunlin**: Large numbers on rice fields.
58. **Little Stint**: Small flocks seen on rice fields.
59. **Ruff**: Flocks present on rice fields.
60. **Common Snipe**: Present in large numbers on rice fields.
61. **Jack Snipe**: At least four seen on 4th February.
62. **Common Curlew**: Seen on rice fields on 4th and 11th February.
63. **Black-tailed Godwit**: Flocks on the rice fields.
64. **Spotted Redshank**: Seen on rice fields.
65. **Common Redshank**: Seen on 6th and 11th February on rice fields.
66. **Greenshank**: Common on rice fields.
67. **Green Sandpiper**: Common and widespread.
68. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen almost every day.
69. **Black-headed Gull**: Very common.
70. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains and also beside rice fields.
71. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Seen on plains on 7th February.
72. **Rock/Feral Pigeon**: Seen daily.
73. **Stock Dove**: About 275 seen on plains west of Trujillo on 7th February.
74. **Wood Pigeon**: Seen daily.
75. **Collared Dove**: Seen daily.
76. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: Seen near Sierra Brava and near Campo Lugar.
77. **Eagle Owl**: Pair seen near Sierra Brava.
78. **Little Owl**: Seen on the plains.
79. **Long-eared Owl**: Two seen near Campo Lugar.
80. **Kingfisher**: Seen most days.
81. **Hoopoe**: Seen daily.
82. **Iberian Green Woodpecker**: Heard at Properina, in the Villuercas and seen on return to Madrid.
83. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen on several days.
84. **Monk Parakeet**: Seen in Madrid.

85. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on the plains.
86. **Crested Lark**: Seen most days.
87. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on three days.
88. **Woodlark**: Singing on three days, especially in the Villuercas.
89. **Skylark**: Present on rice fields and plains.
90. **Crag Martin**: Seen almost daily.
91. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
92. **House Martin**: Seen most days.
93. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen almost daily.
94. **Water Pipit**: Seen on the rice fields.
95. **Grey Wagtail**: seen on most days.
96. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
97. **Yellow Wagtail**: Seen on rice fields.
98. **Dipper**: Seen in the Villuercas.
99. **Wren**: Seen on several days.
100. **Dunnock**: Seen in the Villuercas.
101. **Robin**: Seen almost daily.
102. **Bluethroat**: Seen on rice fields.
103. **Black Redstart**: Seen almost daily.
104. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
105. **Black Wheatear**: Seen at Alange.
106. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Alange, Monfragüe and the Villuercas.
107. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
108. **Song Thrush**: Seen daily.
109. **Redwing**: Seen on two days.
110. **Mistle Thrush**: Recorded on two days.
111. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded most days.
112. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on several days.
113. **Dartford Warbler**: Recorded on three days.
114. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
115. **Blackcap**: Large numbers where wild olives grew.
116. **Chiffchaff**: Seen daily.
117. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on several days.
118. **Crested Tit**: Seen in Monfragüe, also in Villuercas.
119. **Blue Tit**: Seen most days.
120. **Great Tit**: Seen most days.
121. **Nuthatch**: Heard in the Villuercas.
122. **Short-toed Treecreeper**: Seen in Monfragüe.
123. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
124. **Jay**: Seen in the Villuercas.
125. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
126. **Common Magpie**: Seen daily.
127. **Jackdaw**: Seen most days.
128. **Raven**: Seen almost every day.
129. **Common Starling**: Seen on the plains.
130. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
131. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
132. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen almost every day, sometimes in large flocks.
133. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on the rice fields.
134. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on the rice fields.
135. **Common Waxbill**: Seen on the rice fields.

- 136. **Chaffinch:** Seen daily.
- 137. **Brambling:** Seen on 6th February.
- 138. **Serin:** Seen daily.
- 139. **Greenfinch:** Seen a few days.
- 140. **Goldfinch:** Seen daily.
- 141. **Siskin:** Seen on several days.
- 142. **Linnet:** Seen daily.
- 143. **Hawfinch:** Seen well at Monfragüe also at River Tamuja.
- 144. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Monfragüe.
- 145. **Reed Bunting:** Seen on rice fields on 11th February.
- 146. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Mammals

Rabbit

Red Deer

Reptiles and Amphibians

Spanish Terrapin

Butterflies

Swallowtail

Red Admiral

Small White

Western Dappled White

Clouded Yellow

Brimstone

Small Copper

Holly Blue

Common Blue

Brown Argus

Large Tortoiseshell

Small Heath

Wall Brown

Speckled Wood