

# BIRDING EXTREMADURA



EARLY SPRING HOLIDAY FOR DELIA

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

15<sup>th</sup> February – 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2025



*Delia photographing Vagrant Emperors*

## Itinerary

**15<sup>th</sup> February 2025:** Collection at Madrid and onward to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

**16<sup>th</sup> February 2025:** Rice fields near Madrigalejo, Moheda Alta and Palazuelo

**17<sup>th</sup> February 2025:** Arrocampo and Monfragüe National Park

**18<sup>th</sup> February 2025:** Sierra Grande de Hornachos and Chozos de Llera

**19<sup>th</sup> February 2025:** Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, Trujillo

**20<sup>th</sup> February 2025:** Campo Lugar plains and Alcollarín Reservoir

**21<sup>st</sup> February 2025:** Woodlands at Garciaz and rice fields near Madrigalejo

**22<sup>nd</sup> February 2025:** The plains between Trujillo and Cáceres and return to Madrid

## TRIP REPORT

### 15<sup>th</sup> February 2025: Collection at Madrid and onward to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Martin met Delia at Terminal 2 of Madrid airport at about 16.15 and the traffic was quite light as we made our way along the southern-half of the ring-road and then onto the motorway to Extremadura. It was a very smooth trip, with fine weather and snow on the peaks of the Gredos Mountains to the north of us, which we could see for most of the journey.

**White Storks** were standing on their nests in the afternoon sun and an occasional **Red Kite** glided effortlessly over the road. We arrived shortly after 19.00 at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

### 16<sup>th</sup> February 2025: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo

We enjoyed clear blue skies, sunshine and very little wind practically the whole day, with the temperature reaching the high teens in the afternoon. We headed south, through Zorita, across the plains and past the Sierra Brava reservoir. Near there we saw a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** being chased by **Common Magpies**. On the rice fields south of the reservoir, we saw our first groups of **Common Cranes**, as well as flocks of **Spanish Sparrows**. An **Iberian Grey Shrike** perched in wonderful light close by.

To the south near the village of Vegas Altas, we came across more **Common Cranes** and saw our first tractor busy mashing up the rice stubble and attracting a large number of egrets and gulls to the churned-up mud. After a coffee stop in the village, we proceeded to the open *dehesa* woodland of Moheda Alta. Here we stood in silence as throngs of migrating **Common Cranes** passed overhead. A beautiful and poignant sight. The only thing which distracted us was a **Vagrant Emperor** which flew across an open area. It was the first of many that we saw during the rest of the day, especially once we had returned to the rice fields in the afternoon.



*Kentish Plovers*

After a picnic beside the River Gargaligas, where we saw two more dragonflies, we moved to the rice fields near Palazuelo. We spent quite a long time watching and eventually photographing the **Vagrant Emperors**. But the birds were also superb, with groups of **Common Cranes**, numerous pipits and wagtails (including **Water Pipit** and the Iberian race of **Yellow Wagtail**), **Spoonbill** and flocks of **Glossy Ibis**. Groups of **Kentish Plovers** were also charming.

## 17<sup>th</sup> February 2025: Arrocampo and Monfragüe National Park

The day started with just scattered cloud. As we approached our first stop at the Arrocampo Reservoir, we entered thick banks of fog, however, almost miraculously when we arrived we left the fog behind us and enjoyed for the morning absolutely perfect conditions: gentle sunshine and no wind. We spent the morning beside the eastern side of the marsh. A group of **Black-crowned Night Herons** were roosting in trees, **Barn Swallows** and **Common Chiffchaff** were busy catching small insects. Stonechats were singing. We were delighted to get a quite prolonged view of a **Wryneck** and immediately afterward of a male **Bluethroat** in full breeding plumage.



*Wryneck*

Other birds seen included **Common Waxbills**, **Zitting Cisticolas**, **Western Swamphen** and **Spanish Sparrows**.

After a coffee break, we stopped at a small pool where there were **Glossy Ibis** and **Spoonbill** and then continued onward to the Monfragüe National Park. We had our picnic at the Portilla del Tiétar. It was beautifully still and peaceful, with lovely reflections of the impressive geology. An **Otter** was seen swimming across the river. A few **Griffon Vultures** soared over the rocks, whilst others sat on nests. Two **Spanish Imperial Eagles** were seen flying high overhead. **Long-tailed Tits** and a **Firecrest** were in the small trees beside the road. **Angel's Tears Narcissus** were in bloom on the hillside. A lovely spot.

We made a second stop at the Puerto de Serrania, where two **Egyptian Vultures** were seen soaring in a group of **Griffon Vultures**. A **Nettle-Tree Butterfly** in fresh condition was perched at the end of a twig. We continued to the famous Peña Falcon viewpoint, where over a hundred **Griffon Vultures** were circling. We spent an hour or so there as well, mesmerised by the vultures, but also two **Black Stork** and a **Peregrine** stooping a pigeon. **Black Redstarts** were



feeding just below where we stood. We completed our visit with a climb to the castle which then afforded us amazing views across the *dehesa* landscape south to Trujillo. We had eye-level views of the vultures, some of which were carrying nesting material. **Crag Martins** and **Red-rumped Swallows** hawked insects.

We then returned to Trujillo and onward to Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

#### **18<sup>th</sup> February 2025: Sierra Grande de Hornachos and Chozos de Llera**

The weather remained dry all day, generally overcast and with a fresh wind. We made the journey south-west to Hornachos, a town which nestles on the flank of a great sierra, which has an Arab fortress on one of its ridges. Here we stopped for a coffee and thus suitably refreshed spent a couple of hours walking along valley above the town. We had several good views of **Black Wheatear** and a very obliging **Thekla Lark**. Other small birds included **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Sardinian Warblers** and **Greenfinch**, along with masses of **Blackcaps** which stayed resolutely in cover. A distant **Golden Eagle** was also seen.



*Thekla Lark*

We then moved to the Chozos de Llera, a viewpoint overlooking the Matachel River where we spent the rest of the day until dusk. We did not see a hope-for Iberian Lynx, but did see a very large **Wild Boar** and a good selection of birds, including **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, **Red-billed Chough**, **Iberian Green Woodpecker**, as well as **Grey Heron**, **Common Kestrel** and **Red-legged**

**Partridge.** We returned to base by just after 20.30, a full day out of doors in wonderful landscapes.

#### **19<sup>th</sup> February 2025: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres, Trujillo**

We enjoyed generally fine weather today, a mostly cloudy sky, but with little rain and very light winds. We started the birding on the plains just east of Cáceres. Here we had a very productive morning photographing small birds beside a track crossing the plains: **Crested** and **Calandra Larks**, **Corn Buntings**, **Meadow Pipits** and **Zitting Cisticolas**. A **Little Owl** was very obliging and we also watched a **Lesser Kestrel** colony for a while. We did find some **Great Bustards** but they were well hidden on a far slope of a field. Flocks of **Black-bellied** and **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** were also seen in flight.

After coffee in the charming little village of Santa Marta de Magasca, where **House Martins** were building their nests on the facade of the Town Hall, we stopped at the bridge of the River Tamuja where **Crag Martins** were busy. Nearby was a pull-off on the road where we had our picnic. Sadly, the very overcast conditions at that point did not make it very promising for birds of prey. We then drove north of the village back on to the plains, but hit a belt of inclement weather and so we moved to an area of open country just to the west of Trujillo. Here we saw a single **Great Bustard**, and a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, but once again it was the small birds which kept us entertained, as well as finding a mating pair of **Green-striped White** butterflies.



*Green-striped White*

We made a short diversion to look for any remaining cranes in the *dehesa* and then moved onto Trujillo. At the San Lazaro Lake we watched **White Wagtails** and **Common Chiffchaffs** hawking insects. Nearby at the old silo building, six to eight **Lesser Kestrels** were already entering nest sites.



*Lesser Kestrel*

#### **20<sup>th</sup> February 2025: Campo Lugar plains and Alcollarín Reservoir**

We set off a little earlier than usual to take advantage of the expected fine weather, which proved as forecast: warm and sunny with no wind. We spent the first half of the morning on the plains near Campo Lugar. Here we saw a small group of **Great Bustard** and a solitary male (which started to display), but all were rather far away. Closer at hand were our friends the **Corn Buntings**, **Calandra Larks**, **Crested Larks** and small finches such as **Linnets** and **Goldfinches**. There were parties of cranes feeding in the fields. We stopped to watch a female **Sparrowhawk** plucking its recently taken Collared Dove. After coffee near Campo Lugar we moved onto the Alcollarín Reservoir. We had a pleasant walk to start with around the olive groves below the dam where there were groups of **Spanish Sparrows**. At the reservoir itself we made several stops on the eastern shore. **Marsh Harriers** were in display and a female **Hen Harrier** flew over. Walking down to the water's edge we came across what we had been looking for.



*Vagrant Emperor (Delia)*

A large number of **Vagrant Emperors** were patrolling the lake shore. Usually hovering near the water surface, they would sometimes climb rapidly to catch a small insect. There were pairs flying in tandem and we had superb views of a pair in a mating wheel. It was a superb and rewarding experience. We returned to the picnic area, seeing **Vagrant Emperors** along the track as we drove. Afterward we visited the western shore to look at the large numbers of duck, mainly **Shoveler**, **Mallard**, **Teal**, **Wigeon** and with some **Gadwall** and **Pintail**. There were four **Ruddy Shelduck** present. Groups of **Lapwing** were on the shore, and dragonflies were everywhere. A **Viperine Snake** was basking on the sandy track.



*Vagrant Emperor (Delia)*



We completed the afternoon with a short drive through the rice fields. There were hardly any **Common Cranes** left, but we did have excellent views of **Lapwing** and the fields seemed full of **Black-headed** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**.



*Lapwing (Delia)*

#### **21<sup>st</sup> February 2025: Woodlands at Garciaz and rice fields near Madrigalejo**

It was a cooler and more cloudy day today, with a breeze that built up during the afternoon. We spent the morning near the village of Garciaz, having a walk before coffee in an area of open woodland. This was a lovely landscape and birds seen included at least three **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers**, four **Cirl Buntings** and several **Mistle Thrushes**. After a coffee in a typical village bar, with four people playing cards with four spectators, we climbed a bit higher and had another long walk through pinewoods and sweet chestnut groves. There were parties of woodland birds including **Crested Tit**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Firecrest** and **Goldcrest**.

After our picnic we made a final return to the rice fields near Madrigalejo. Despite the fresher and more overcast weather the **Vagrant Emperors** were still active and we saw several pairs flying in tandem. **Marsh Harriers** quartered the stubble fields and we saw two female **Merlin** having a dispute. There were flocks of **Red Avadavats** and **Spanish Sparrows** and still a large flock of about 400 **Common Cranes** present.





*Walk at Garciaz*

## **22<sup>nd</sup> February 2025: The plains between Trujillo and Cáceres and return to Madrid**

It had rained heavily during the night and the day dawn overcast. There was a fresh wind during the morning making it feel quite chilly, only once we were on our return to Madrid did the sunshine break out.

After bidding farewell at Casa Rural El Recuerdi, we retraced some of our visit to the plains between Trujillo and Cáceres. Our planned walk along a medieval drovers' trail were thwarted because of the muddy conditions, but we did watch **Golden Plover** on the fields and heard both **Pin-tailed** and **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. We had coffee at the little bar in Santa Marta de Magasca and then stopped to look at **Lesser Kestrels** and watch some high-flying **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**. Further on we saw a group of rather distant **Great Bustards** and thereafter had good opportunities to photograph birds like **Calandra Lark**, **Linnet** and **Crested Larks**.

At 12.30 it was time to head to Madrid and with just a couple of stops to have our picnic, whilst admiring **White Storks** at a colony and then a pitstop, we reached the airport shortly after 3.30, having enjoyed light Saturday afternoon traffic around Madrid.

### **BIRDS SEEN OR HEARD**

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on two days
2. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Alcollarín and on the rice fields.
3. **Ruddy Shelduck**: Four at Alcollarín.
4. **Wigeon**: Seen at Alcollarín.
5. **Gadwall**: Seen at Alcollarín and on the plains.

6. **Eurasian Teal:** Seen at Alcollarín.
7. **Pintail:** Seen at Alcollarín.
8. **Mallard:** Seen daily.
9. **Northern Shoveler:** Seen at Alcollarín and on the plains.
10. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen most days.
11. **Little Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín and Trujillo
12. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín
13. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on three days.
14. **Little Bittern:** Heard at Arrocampo.
15. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo.
16. **Western Cattle Egret:** Seen on most days.
17. **Little Egret:** Seen on most days.
18. **Great White Egret:** Seen almost every day
19. **Grey Heron:** Seen almost daily.
20. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe.
21. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
22. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen on the rice fields
23. **Spoonbill:** Seen on the rice fields and Alcollarín.
24. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen at Monfragüe.
25. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
26. **Black Vulture:** Seen on plains and Monfragüe.
27. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** A pair seen at Monfrgaüe and Hornachos.
28. **Golden Eagle:** Seen at Hornachos.
29. **Red Kite:** Seen every day.
30. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen every day.
31. **Hen Harrier:** Seen at Alcollarín.
32. **Common Buzzard:** Seen almost every day.
33. **Sparrowhawk:** Seen near Campo Lugar.
34. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen at Trujillo and on the plains.
35. **Common Kestrel:** Seen most days.
36. **Merlin:** Seen on the rice fields.
37. **Peregrine:** Seen at Monfragüe.
38. **Water Rail:** Heard at Arrocampo.
39. **Common Moorhen:** Seen at Arrocampo and Trujillo.
40. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
41. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Trujillo.
42. **Common Crane:** Seen in thousands at the rice fields and departing on migration.
43. **Great Bustard:** Flocks seen on plains east of Cáceres and Campo Lugar.
44. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen at Arrocampo.
45. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
46. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
47. **Golden Plover:** Seen on the plains.
48. **Lapwing:** Seen every day.
49. **Greenshank:** Seen on the rice fields, Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
50. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.
51. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen most days.
52. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen every day.
53. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.

54. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
55. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
56. **Common Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
57. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
58. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** One seen near Sierra Brava Reservoir.
59. **Short-eared Owl:** One seen distantly on the rice fields.
60. **Little Owl:** Seen on the plains.
61. **Kingfisher:** Seen at Arrocampo.
62. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost every day.
63. **Wryneck:** One seen at Arrocampo.
64. **Iberian Green Woodpecker:** Seen at Chozos de Llera.
65. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** Seen at Garciaz.
66. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
67. **Crested Lark:** Seen almost every day.
68. **Thekla Lark:** Seen almost every day.
69. **Skylark:** Seen at Arrocampo.
70. **Woodlark:** Seen at Garciaz.
71. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
72. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
73. **Red-rumped Swallow:** Seen at Monfragüe.
74. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
75. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen daily.
76. **Water Pipit:** Seen on the rice fields.
77. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the rice fields
78. **White Wagtail:** Seen every day.
79. **Dunnock:** heard at Hornachos.
80. **Robin:** Seen daily.
81. **Bluethroat:** Seen well at Arrocampo, also present on the rice fields.
82. **Black Redstart:** Seen almost every day.
83. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
84. **Black Wheatear:** Seen at Hornachos.
85. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Monfragüe and Hornachos.
86. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
87. **Song Thrush:** Seen almost daily.
88. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen at Garciaz.
89. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded almost every day.
90. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen almost every day.
91. **Common Reed Warbler:** One on the rice fields.
92. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen at Hornachos.
93. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
94. **Blackcap:** Seen almost daily.
95. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen daily.
96. **Firecrest:** Seen near Garciaz and Monfragüe.
97. **Goldcrest:** Seen near Garciaz.
98. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
99. **Crested Tit:** Seen near Garciaz.
100. **Blue Tit:** Seen most days.
101. **Great Tit:** Seen most days.



102. **Nuthatch:** Seen near Garciaz.
103. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen near Garciaz.
104. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Arrocampo.
105. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
106. **Jay:** Seen on two days.
107. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
108. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
109. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
110. **Raven:** Seen most days.
111. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains.
112. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
113. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
114. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
115. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on the rice fields and Campo Lugar.
116. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Garciaz.
117. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields.
118. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
119. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
120. **Serin:** Seen almost daily.
121. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
122. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost every day.
123. **Linnet:** Seen on the plains.
124. **Hawfinch:** Seen on a couple of days.
125. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen at Garciaz.
126. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Hornachos and Garciaz.
127. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

## **Mammals**

Otter

Roe Deer

Rabbit

Wild Boar

## **Reptiles**

Spanish Terrapin

Viperine Snake

## **Dragonflies**

Vagrant Emperor