

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SHORT WINTER BREAK FOR SARAH, SUE AND ULRIKE

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

24th January – 28th January 2025



Itinerary

24th January 2025: Collection at Navalmoral and afternoon visit to Arrocampo

25th January 2025: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo, Campo Lugar and Alcollarín

26th January 2025: Alange, Roman Bridge at Mérida, Lobón

27th January 2025: Plains east of Cáceres, Tamuja River, plains north of Trujillo, Trujillo.

28th January 2025: Arrocampo Reservoir and onward journey to Madrid.

TRIP REPORT

24th January 2025: Collection at Navalморal and afternoon visit to Arrocampo

Martin met Sarah, Sue and Ulrike off the Madrid train at its punctual arrival at Navalморal de la Mata. It was just a few minutes' drive to the motorway service area where we had a filling snack of Spanish tortilla in a baguette. And then it was an even shorter drive to our birding spot at the Arrocampo Reservoir, but not before seeing a **Black-winged Kite** flying close to the road with a prey item.

At Arrocampo, against rather leaden skies, we saw **Barn Swallows** and **House Martins**. Beside a water channel we had our first of several sightings of **Kingfisher**, much to Ulrike's pleasure especially. **Common Chiffchaffs** hawked small insects and in bare winter trees a group of seven **Black-crowned Night Herons** snoozed.

From the reeds we could hear **Western Swamphen** and **Little Bittern**, but nothing was showing. So, we walked along the edge of the marsh, enjoying views of mating **White Stork**, **Stonechats** and **Crested Lark**. There were some very showy **Spanish Sparrows** feeding on the grazed sward of a wet meadow.

From the ramp of one of the hides we got our first glimpses of **Western Swamphen** and **Cetti's Warbler**. **Great White**, **Little** and **Cattle Egret** were seen, whilst **Marsh Harriers** quartered the vegetation. **Common Chiffchaffs** appeared to be almost everywhere. A **Hoopoe** foraged on the track nearby.

Returning to the car, we stopped beside the first section of the marsh again, this time having a more prolonged view of a **Western Swamphen**. It was then time to continue our journey and we reached Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Claudia's warm welcome by about 18.00.

25th January 2025: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo, Campo Lugar and Alcollarín

There was heavy rain just before dawn and it was still heavily overcast with light rain as we set off. We headed southwards, through some hill mist to start with and then, at lower elevation across the plains south of Zorita and then south of the Sierra Brava Reservoir. The water was shrouded with mist, with very poor visibility so it was not worth stopping, but we did see **Barn Swallow**, **Crag Martin** and **House Martin** on the dam wall. On the rice fields south of the reservoir we made our first stop to watch the first (of many) **Common Cranes** of the day. A male **Hen Harrier** also put in an appearance and **Lapwing** were standing in some of the flooded fields. In an area of rough pasture and scattered trees we had nice views of a **Black-winged Kite**, which at one moment shared a bare tree with an **Iberian Grey Shrike** and a **Hoopoe**. We stopped beside an old gravel pit, watching a pair of vert bedraggled **White Storks** giving their bill-clacking greeting ceremony close to where we stood.

We then moved onto the rice fields south of Madrigalejo, seeing more **Common Cranes** and **Marsh Harriers** before a very welcome stop for coffee. The **Common Crane** agenda continued afterwards with another view of a **Hen Harrier**, some superb aerial display of a pair of **Marsh Harriers** and fleeting views of **Red Avadavats**.



Flocks of Common Cranes

We had our picnic beside the Gargaligas River, where there were **Spanish Sparrows**, a pair of **White Stork** and a **Kingfisher**. We proceeded north-west to the rice fields near Palazuelo. Here again there were hundreds of **Common Crane**, and large flocks of **Dunlin**. We also enjoyed watching **Kentish** and **Common Ringed Plover**, a **Little Stint**, groups of **Golden Plover**, and a **Spoonbill** but the highlight was certainly a wonderful **Short-eared Owl**.



Short-eared Owl

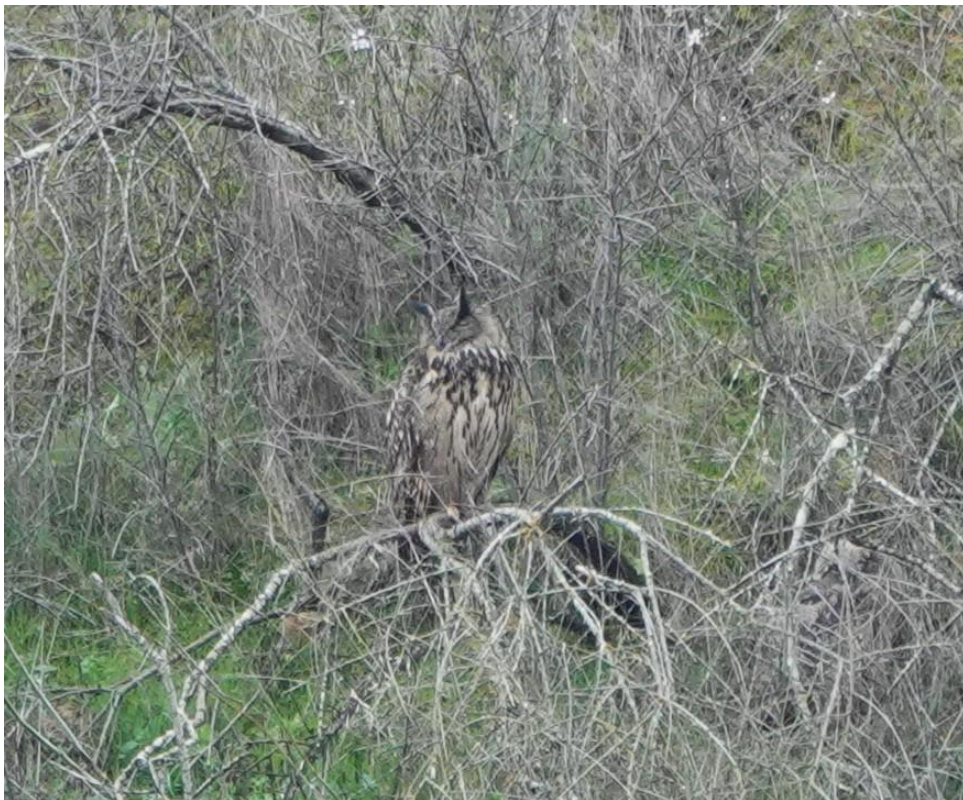
Near Campo Lugar we found a roosting **Stone Curlew** and we completed the day on the dam wall of Alcollarín Reservoir. Here there were thousands of **Shoveler**, three species of grebe and a very distant **Black Stork**.

26th January 2025: Alange, Roman Bridge at Mérida, Lobón

It was heavily overcast as we left, but by the time we reached our first destination, the clouds were a bit higher and we enjoyed somewhat brighter light. It remained dry all day but there were periods of more gusty conditions in the afternoon.

At Alange we enjoyed a lovely long walk beside the reservoir, with a rocky outcrop to our left as we headed towards the small town. Being Sunday, the path was well-used by local folk, but that did not cause any problems for the birding at all. The olive trees around us were full of **Blackcaps**, many in song. **Thekla Larks** foraged close to the path. Out on the lake there were **Great Crested Grebes** and **Cormorants**, and we were happy to find an **Osprey** perched on a spit. **Griffon Vultures** glided close above us. At the edge of town, we saw **Blue Rock Thrush** and a pair of **Black Wheatears**, which was our target bird. After having spent much of yesterday in or close to the car, it was very refreshing to get a good walk done this morning.

After a welcome coffee in Alange, we drove to Mérida, along a road where there were **White Stork** nests on almost every pole. At Mérida we took a walk along the two-thousand-year-old Roman Bridge. It was just a few minutes into the walk when we spotted a female **Little Bittern** which showed itself beautifully. Along the bridge we saw numerous **Great Cormorants**, a **Black-crowned Night Heron** and a series of small birds such as **Long-tailed Tit** and **Common Chiffchaff**. Our picnic spot was just downstream on the Guadiana River, where we ate our sandwich watching a flock of resting **Lesser Black-backed** and **Black-headed Gulls**. Egrets were also present and overhead passed a **Glossy Ibis**.



Eagle Owl

We continued downstream to an area of riverine woodland and a crumbling cliff. Here we had magnificent and prolonged views of an **Eagle Owl**, sometimes mobbed by **Iberian Magpies**. **Cetti's Warblers** sang from the vegetation nearby and as we left, we saw a group of **Common Waxbills**.

27th January 2025: Plains east of Cáceres, Tamuja River, plains north of Trujillo, Trujillo.



Ulrike's weather app works

Today was the stormy day we had been promised. There was heavy rain during the night and well into the morning. This was backed-up by a fierce, gusty wind. Nevertheless, but perhaps with some trepidation, we set off at about 10.00. As we drove west towards Cáceres we went through some torrential downpours, we moved onto the plains but quickly decided to go for a coffee instead, inspired by the news from Ulrike's app that in 25 minutes the sun would come out. As we sat in the bar, the sky started to clear, a rainbow appeared and exactly as had predicted the weather app, the sun came out. We managed to stay dry for the rest of the day, passing showers were light and some of the skylscapes were amazing. The only challenge for the rest of the day were the gale force winds.

Nevertheless, the birding provided excellent. At our first stop we found a flock of **Great Bustards**, just a bit further on there were small flocks of **Black-bellied** and **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, although we only got to see them in flight. The wet ground was proving good foraging habitat for small birds like larks and pipits. We even managed to find two **Little Owls**. Three **Red Foxes** were watched as they crossed a field in the sunshine.

At the Tamuja river valley we had our picnic, enjoying the view of the river in spate. An adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** put on a good show for us, as did a succession of **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** and **Red Kites**, but pride of place was a pair of **Kingfishers** which sat together for several minutes.



Watching Kingfishers

Back on the plains, we found a field with a lovely mixture of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover** scattered across its surface. At the same spot we watched a flock of 40 **Little Bustards** in flight and then settling on a distant field.

We proceed to Trujillo where we visited the main square and then walked around the town, up the Arab fortress, and through the medieval town. At the park beside the town, which as closed because of the gales, we could see through the chain-link fence a large number of **Barn Swallows**, House Martins and **Crag Martins** feeding low over the water.

28th January 2025: Arrocampo Reservoir and onward journey to Madrid.

The heavy rain appeared to have passed on, but there were strong south-westerly winds all day. We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo after breakfast, with enough time for Sarah to find a **Hawfinch**. We stopped again at the Arrocampo Reservoir at Saucedilla, with an hour to spare for a walk beside the marsh. As clouds moved across the Gredos Mountains to the north we could see that there had been a fresh fall of snow there overnight.

As expected the wind made finding small birds in the reedbeds very difficult. A **Black-crowned Night Heron** flew from its roosting tree. We enjoyed a wonderful large flock of **Serins** feeding on seed heads. A **Water Pipit** was on the short grass beside some **Meadow Pipits**. A **Kingfisher** was heard and Martin had brief views of two **Penduline Tits** in flight. The conditions were challenging and birds made only very brief appearances before diving into cover, which is precisely what a **Bluethroat** did, sadly. However, we were overjoyed at the end of the walk to

have quite a prolonged view of a **Wryneck** in a tree where it had joined a small flock of **House Sparrows**. It was one of the sought-after species and we were indeed very lucky to find one, given the circumstances.



Wryneck

After that it was a swift stop for coffee and then onward non-stop to the airport, which we arrived precisely as planned at 14.15.

It was the conclusion of a very happy and very productive five days of birding in Extremadura.

BIRDS SEEN OR HEARD

1. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen on two days
2. **Eurasian Teal:** Seen on pool at Campo Lugar and Alcollarín.
3. **Mallard:** Seen daily.
4. **Northern Shoveler:** Seen most days, with thousands at Alcollarín
5. **Red-legged Partridge:** Seen at Lobón
6. **Little Grebe:** Seen on three days.
7. **Great Crested Grebe:** Seen at Alange, Mérida and Alcollarín
8. **Black-necked Grebe:** Seen at Alcollarín
9. **Great Cormorant:** Seen every day.
10. **Little Bittern:** One seen in Mérida. Heard at Arrocampo.
11. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
12. **Western Cattle Egret:** Seen on three days.
13. **Little Egret:** Seen almost every day.
14. **Great White Egret:** Seen daily.
15. **Grey Heron:** Seen daily.

16. **Black Stork:** One seen at Alcollarín
17. **White Stork:** Seen daily.
18. **Glossy Ibis:** One seen at Mérida.
19. **Spoonbill:** Seen on the rice fields and at Mérida.
20. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen almost every day.
21. **Black Vulture:** Seen on plains and at Arrocampo.
22. **Osprey:** One seen at Alange.
23. **Spanish Imperial Eagle:** An adult seen at River Tamuja.
24. **Red Kite:** Seen every day.
25. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen every day.
26. **Hen Harrier:** Seen on the rice fields.
27. **Common Buzzard:** Seen on two days.
28. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen at Arrocampo and near Madrigalejo.
29. **Common Kestrel:** Seen every day.
30. **Water Rail:** Heard on three days.
31. **Common Moorhen:** Seen on four days.
32. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
33. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Trujillo.
34. **Common Crane:** Seen in thousands at the rice fields.
35. **Little Bustard:** A flock of 40 seen on the plains north of Trujillo.
36. **Great Bustard:** Two flocks seen on plains east of Cáceres.
37. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on small pool near Zorita.
38. **Stone Curlew:** One seen near Campo Lugar.
39. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen near Zorita.
40. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
41. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
42. **Golden Plover:** Seen on the rice fields and the plains.
43. **Lapwing:** Seen almost every day.
44. **Dunlin:** Large flocks on the rice fields.
45. **Little Stint:** One seen on the rice fields.
46. **Common Snipe:** Seen at Arrocampo and the rice fields.
47. **Greenshank:** Seen on the rice fields.
48. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.
49. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen most days.
50. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen most days.
51. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
52. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
53. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
54. **Common Woodpigeon:** Seen daily.
55. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
56. **Eagle Owl:** Seen at Lobón.
57. **Little Owl:** Seen on the plains.
58. **Short-eared Owl:** Seen on the rice fields.
59. **Kingfisher:** Seen almost every day.
60. **Hoopoe:** Seen almost every day.
61. **Wryneck:** One seen at Arrocampo.
62. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** One seen on the rice fields.
63. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.

64. **Crested Lark**: Seen every day.
65. **Thekla Lark**: Seen at Alange and on the plains.
66. **Skylark**: Seen on the rice fields and on the plains.
67. **Crag Martin**: Seen most days.
68. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
69. **House Martin**: Seen daily.
70. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen most days.
71. **Water Pipit**: Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.
72. **Grey Wagtail**: One seen in Trujillo.
73. **White Wagtail**: Seen very day.
74. **Wren**: Singing in the garden.
75. **Robin**: Seen daily.
76. **Bluethroat**: Seen briefly at Arrocampo.
77. **Black Redstart**: Seen almost every day.
78. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
79. **Black Wheatear**: A pair at Alange.
80. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Alange.
81. **Blackbird**: Seen most days.
82. **Song Thrush**: Seen daily.
83. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded almost every day.
84. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen almost every day.
85. **Dartford Warbler**: One seen briefly on the rice fields.
86. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen almost daily.
87. **Blackcap**: Seen almost daily.
88. **Common Chiffchaff**: Seen daily.
89. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen at Mérida.
90. **Great Tit**: Seen on one day.
91. **Penduline Tit**: Seen briefly at Arrocampo.
92. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
93. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
94. **Magpie**: Seen daily.
95. **Jackdaw**: Seen daily.
96. **Raven**: Seen most days.
97. **Common Starling**: Seen on the plains.
98. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
99. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
100. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen on two days.
101. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on two days.
102. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
103. **Common Waxbill**: Seen on the rice fields and at Lobón.
104. **Chaffinch**: Seen most days.
105. **Serin**: A large flock seen at Arrocampo.
106. **Greenfinch**: Seen most days.
107. **Goldfinch**: Seen every day.
108. **Linnet**: Seen on two days.
109. **Hawfinch**: seen in the garden.
110. **Reed Bunting**: Seen at Arrocampo.
111. **Corn Bunting**: Seen daily.