

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SPRING IN EXTREMADURA FOR JIM AND JENNIFER

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

3rd May – 9th May 2025



Photographing Collared Pratincoles

Itinerary

3rd May 2025: Collection from Madrid, Arrocampo Reservoir and drive to Extremadura

4th May 2025: Campo Lugar, ricefields near Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas and Palazuelo, Alcollarín Reservoir

5th May 2025: Monfragüe National Park

6th May 2025: Plains north and west of Trujillo and Cáceres

7th May 2025: Plains west of Trujillo, Jaraicejo heath and Miravete Pass, Trujillo

8th May 2025: Alcollarín Reservoir, River Guadiana at Don Benito, rice fields at Palazuelo

9th May 2025: Arrocampo and return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

3rd May 2025: Collection from Madrid, Arrocampo Reservoir and drive to Extremadura

Martin met Jim and Jennifer at 11.00 at Madrid airport, and we were quickly heading out around the southern ring-road and then onto the motorway heading to Extremadura. The traffic was light throughout. After a quick snack, we spent the afternoon at Arrocampo. Here a lake which provides cooling water for the Almaraz nuclear power plant, had a fabulous fringing vegetation of lesser reed mace, home to a superb section of birds. Within minutes of arriving, we were listening to **Savi's Warbler**, **Common Reed Warbler**, **Great Reed Warbler** and **Cetti's Warbler**. Overhead passed **Black Vulture** and **Griffon Vulture** whilst **Gull-billed Terns** flew over the water.

At our first stop we watched a beautiful colony of **Purple Heron**. A pair of **Ferruginous Duck** whizzed past. A **Kingfisher** perched quietly in the reeds and a **Great White Egret** came down to feed. A **Western Swampphen** was seen briefly.

We continued our visit with a stop at a separate lagoon, where there were a selection of waders including **Common Sandpiper**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Temminck's Stint**, as well as some **Black-winged Stilt**. A delightful **Squacco Heron** was perched.



Squacco Heron as it flew off

Back on the main marsh, we watched a female **Montagu's Harrier** slowly glide overhead.

It was time to move on, so we continued straight through to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, arriving there at about 17.30. There had been some showers during the day, but on the final leg of the journey we drove through some quite torrential rain.

4th May 2025: Campo Lugar, rice fields near Madrigalejo, Vegas Altas and Palazuelo, Alcollarín Reservoir

The weather was overcast, with some showers, especially in the afternoon. We headed south from Zorita and made a short detour onto the plains of Campo Lugar. A **Little Owl** was sitting on a pile of rocks, and we had our first chance to see **Calandra** and **Greater Short-toed Larks**. We had a wonderful view of a **Roller** close-up. A female **Montagu's Harrier** cruised over the fields. It was then to the Sierra Brava reservoir where we made a brief stop to interpret the combination of landscape and engineering that had derived from Plan Badajoz, the great agricultural irrigation project. We entered the rice fields and then an area of rough pasture with scattered trees, many with nests of **White Storks**. Two **Black-winged Kites** were seen and we had also good views of **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Iberian Magpie**.



Collared Pratincole

Close to Madrigalejo we stopped to watch a group of **Collared Pratincoles** and a very obliging **Iberian Yellow Wagtail**. **Greater Short-toed Larks** were also present in the bare-earth fields.

After coffee at the edge of Madrigalejo, we spent a while driving around the rice fields near the rice-village of Vegas Altas, finding a flock of **Common Ringed Plovers**, with a few **Kentish Plover** too. We returned to the **Collared Pratincole** area to watch them again and have our picnic. We came across an excellent wet field in the area near Palazuelo, with a sizeable flock of **Common Ringed Plovers**, and **Dunlin** and **Gull-billed Terns**.

The afternoon was rounded off at the Alcollarín Reservoir under dramatic skies. Highlights here were displaying **Great Crested Grebes**, **Spoonbill** and a group of **Glossy Ibis**.



Iberian form of Yellow Wagtail

5th May 2025: Monfragüe National Park



The vultures take off

We crossed vast undulating *dehesas* north of Trujillo. After passing through the town of Torrejón El Rubio, the road narrowed as it took us down to cross the Arroyo de la Vid and then up to the first viewpoint in the Monfragüe National Park: the Salto de Gitano, looking across the Tagus River onto the massive quartzite cliff of Peña Falcon. A falcon we did see (a **Peregrine**) but a lot more beside. There were numerous **Griffon Vultures**, a **Black Stork** on its nest, and smaller birds included **Rock Bunting**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart**, **Serins**, **Crag Martins** and **Red-rumped Swallows**. When we arrived, there were still about 200 **Griffon Vultures**

perched on the great rock, during our stay, they sun came out and each one opened its wings to dry the feathers. At one moment dozens lifted off at the same time, the sky dramatically full of vultures.

We made a short stop at the bridge over the River Tagus to watch the myriads of **House Martins** as well as perhaps half a dozen **Alpine Swifts**.

Following coffee in the hamlet in the park (Villareal de San Carlos) we drove through the park, making a short stop to photograph dozens of **House Martins** coming down to collect mud.



House Martins

Onward, we watched three **Rock Sparrows** at a small bridge. We stopped at the viewpoint at Portilla del Tiétar, beside the Tiétar River. Here **Griffon Vultures** were also present. We had sightings of **Western Subalpine Warbler**. But the highlights were a displaying **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and a roosting adult **Eagle Owl**. We enjoyed great views of both. Two **Egyptian Vultures** were perched for some time on the rock, whilst a pair of **Black Stork** soared with the vultures. We stopped for our picnic at a viewpoint looking down on the Tiétar river. Here we had close views of **Black Vulture**, whilst a pair of **Bonelli's Eagles** passed overhead. Driving through a belt of fine, two **Turtle Doves** flew up from the roadside and settled in a tree. Nearby we took a short circular walk. The colours of the wildflowers on the bank below were breathtaking.

We returned through the park, stopped at the northern edge where again we watched a **Bonelli's Eagle** and saw a **Thekla Lark**. A **Black-eared Wheatear** was only glimpsed at. We return to the first viewpoint at Peña Falcón for our final stop.



Eagle Owl

Vultures were returning from their foraging forays and were in attractive clusters gliding across the sky.



Peña Falcón in afternoon sunshine

6th May 2025: Plains north and west of Trujillo and Cáceres

The day was heavily overcast to start, but gradually there were periods of sunshine during the afternoon.

We drove past the town of Trujillo and the granite boulder landscape that surrounds it to descend to the open plains to its north and west. As we drove, there were numerous larks and **Corn Buntings** on the road, and at one time a **Turtle Dove** too. At our first stop we found a displaying **Little Bustard**, as well as a group of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. **Calandra Larks** and **Corn Buntings** were singing around us and a female **Montagu's Harrier** passed across a field. It was only where some farmers drove across the field that we were looking at that it was clear that there were over twenty, rather than just four **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. So, we enjoyed good views of them in flight as well as on the ground. We drove south of the town of Santa Marta de Magasca, seeing **Little Owls** and **Rollers** on the cables beside the road, then taking a minor road across the plains. Along this road we had good views of **Greater Short-toed Lark**, **Calandra Lark** and **Corn Buntings**. We returned to Santa Marta de Magasca for coffee, watching **House Martins** nesting on the façade of the town hall. We watched a colony of **Spanish Sparrows** beside the village for a few minutes before stopping for a picnic in the valley of the Tajuja River. The view across the valley was very impressive. Highlights birdwise included an adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**.



Iberian Magpie

We then headed south and onto Cáceres. We had a very productive afternoon walking in the Parque de Principe. Here the main feature was the number of opportunities of getting close

and confiding views of **Iberian Magpies**. We also saw **Golden Oriole**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Booted Eagle** and vultures drifting overhead.

7th May 2025: Plains west of Trujillo, Jaraicejo heath and Miravete Pass, Trujillo.



Lavander and broom heath

It was a warm and mostly sunny day, with generally light winds. We passed through a belt of *dehesa* landscape just west of Trujillo before entering the *pseudosteppe* plains. Here we drove a short distance down a dirt track and then stopped to scan the landscape around. We had excellent views of **Calandra Larks** and a good opportunity to look at both **Thekla** and **Crested Larks**. We watched a group of eight male **Great Bustards**, striding in stately fashion through the long grass. A **Quail** called from close to us. As we stood, parties of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** flew overhead calling. There was a distant **Spanish Imperial Eagle** perched on a faraway tree.

We moved them to spend the rest of the morning walking on the lavender and broom heathland near Jaraicejo. **Thekla Larks** were abundant, and we also saw a **Spectacled Warbler**, once in a sapling together with a **Thekla Lark**. A **Honey Buzzard** drifted over. In cork oak woodland, we had short views of **Short-toed Treecreeper**, whilst a **Golden Oriole** sang hidden from view. As we drove on, we had close views of a fine melanistic **Montagu's Harrier**.

After coffee, we moved to the Miravete pass, affording us superb views north to the Gredos Mountains, with snow on their peaks. Here we found a **Crested Tit** bringing food to nestlings and we watched from a safe distance for a while. We had our picnic just down from the pass, accompanied by the song of **Woodlark** and **Nightingale**.



Crested Tit

We returned to Trujillo where we spent the afternoon having a wonderful walk through history from Spain's second oldest Arab fortress, past medieval fortified palaces, to the renaissance architecture around the Main Square, with figures like Francisco Pizarro, Orellana, Cervantes, the Catholic monarchs, Maria de Escobar and an unknown stonemason who was a fan of Atletico de Bilbao all making appearances. We completed our urban birding watching the comings and goings of **Lesser Kestrels** at their colony at the edge of town.

8th May 2025: Alcollarín Reservoir, River Guadiana at Don Benito, rice fields at Palazuelo

The day started very misty and remained overcast until lunchtime, whilst in the afternoon we enjoyed some sunshine, albeit with a rather strong wind.

We returned to spend the morning at Alcollarín Reservoir. Our quest was **Bee-eaters**, but although we saw several, none were particularly obliging for photography. However, we were not disappointed with **Woodchat Shrikes** and a **Short-toed Eagle** gave us a wonderful close encounter. However perhaps the most memorable was sitting beside a huge **Spanish Sparrow** colony, with the sound almost deafening and the constant arrivals of males carrying strands of grass for their nests. Other birds included **Common Sandpiper**, **Spoonbill** and a fine drake **Pintail**.



Spanish Sparrow

After coffee, we moved south to spend a couple of hours in some riverine habitat beside the River Guadiana near Don Benito. Here we walked around an old gravel working, now converted to a fishing lake. There were plenty of birds to see: a busy **Spotted Flycatcher**, elusive **Golden Orioles**, singing **Great Reed Warblers**, **Common Waxbill** and a brief sighting of a **Western Olivaceous Warbler**.



Spotted Flycatcher

We returned to the rice fields for the afternoon, having some nice views of **Iberian Yellow Wagtail**. And then a group of **Gull-billed Terns**, **Black-winged Stilts** and **Shelduck**, along with a few waders, such as **Ringed Plover** and **Dunlin**.

9th May 2025: Arrocampo and return to Madrid

We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo under a rather overcast sky, which brightened up by the time we reached our birding stop at Arrocampo. We had a short but productive stop at the marsh, watching again the **Purple Herons** and **Kingfishers**, and a **Squacco Heron** in flight. But this time we were rewarded with much better views of singing **Savi's** and **Great Reed Warblers**, **Purple Swamphens**, and Jim and Jennifer were lucky enough to see a **Little Bittern** fly across a channel.



Great White Egret

We had a coffee in the village of Saucedilla and after organising the bags and sadly packing away the optics, we headed onward to Madrid. Apart from a couple of bottlenecks on the ring-road which slowed us down, we made good progress and reached the airport just a few minutes before our ETA. The end of an enjoyable and successive birding holiday.

BIRDS SEEN OR HEARD

1. Grey Lag Goose
2. Egyptian Goose
3. Gadwall
4. Mallard
5. Pintail
6. Ferruginous Duck
7. Shelduck
8. Red-legged Partridge

9. Common Quail
10. Little Grebe
11. Great Crested Grebe
12. Great Cormorant
13. Little Bittern
14. Squacco Heron
15. Cattle Egret
16. Little Egret
17. Great White Egret
18. Grey Heron
19. Purple Heron
20. Black Stork
21. White Stork
22. Glossy Ibis
23. Spoonbill
24. Egyptian Vulture
25. Griffon Vulture
26. Black Vulture
27. Spanish Imperial Eagle
28. Short-toed Eagle
29. Booted Eagle
30. Bonelli's Eagle
31. Black Kite
32. Red Kite
33. Marsh Harrier
34. Montagu's Harrier
35. Common Buzzard
36. Honey Buzzard
37. Black-winged Kite
38. Lesser Kestrel
39. Common Kestrel
40. Peregrine
41. Moorhen
42. Purple Swamphen
43. Little Bustard
44. Great Bustard
45. Black-winged Stilt
46. Collared Pratincole
47. Common Ringed Plover
48. Little Ringed Plover
49. Kentish Plover
50. Dunlin
51. Temminck's Stint
52. Little Stint
53. Common Sandpiper
54. Gull-billed Tern
55. Black-headed Gull
56. Lesser Black-backed Gull

57. Black-bellied Sandgrouse
58. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
59. Feral Pigeon
60. Wood Pigeon
61. Collared Dove
62. Turtle Dove
63. Common Cuckoo
64. Eagle Owl
65. Little Owl
66. Alpine Swift
67. Common Swift
68. Pallid Swift
69. Kingfisher
70. Bee-eater
71. Roller
72. Hoopoe
73. Calandra Lark
74. Short-toed Lark
75. Crested Lark
76. Thekla Lark
77. Woodlark
78. Sand Martin
79. Crag Martin
80. Barn Swallow
81. Red-rumped Swallow
82. House Martin
83. Yellow Wagtail
84. White Wagtail
85. Wren
86. Robin
87. Nightingale
88. Black Redstart
89. Stonechat
90. Black-eared Wheatear
91. Blue Rock Thrush
92. Blackbird
93. Mistle Thrush
94. Cetti's Warbler
95. Zitting Cisticola
96. Savi's Warbler
97. Reed Warbler
98. Great Reed Warbler
99. Melodious Warbler
100. Western Olivaceous Warbler
101. Spectacled Warbler
102. Subalpine Warbler
103. Sardinian Warbler
104. Blackcap

105. Spotted Flycatcher
106. Long-tailed Tit
107. Crested Tit
108. Blue Tit
109. Great Tit
110. Short-toed Treecreeper
111. Golden Oriole
112. Iberian Grey Shrike
113. Woodchat Shrike
114. Jay
115. Iberian Magpie
116. Common Magpie
117. Jackdaw
118. Raven
119. Spotless Starling
120. House Sparrow
121. Spanish Sparrow
122. Rock Sparrow
123. Common Waxbill
124. Red Avadavat
125. Chaffinch
126. Serin
127. Greenfinch
128. Goldfinch
129. Linnet
130. Rock Bunting
131. Corn Bunting

MAMMALS SEEN

Egyptian Mongoose

LIZARDS

Western Psammmodromus

Geniez's Wall Lizard