

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



LATE WINTER HOLIDAY FOR JOHN AND DEBORAH

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

6th February – 13th February 2025



Watching Eagle Owl

Itinerary

6th February 2025: Collection at Madrid and onward to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

7th February 2025: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo

8th February 2025: Plains between Cáceres and Trujillo, Trujillo

9th February 2025: Garciaz, Campo Lugar, rice fields at Puebla de Alcollarín and Alcollarín

10th February 2025: Arrocampo and Monfragüe National Park

11th February 2025: Montánchez Castle, Santa Amalia, Orellana Reservoir and rice fields of Vegas Altas

12th February 2025: Alange, Guadiana River at Mérida, Lobón and Trujillo

13th February 2025: Miravete Pass and onward to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

6th February 2025: Collection at Madrid and onward to Casa Rural El Recuerdo

Martin met John and Deborah at Terminal 4 of Madrid airport at about 15.00 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 had a pitstop about halfway through the journey and arrived shortly after 18.00 at Casa Rural El Recuerdo.

7th February 2025: Rice fields near Madrigalejo and Palazuelo

The day dawned clear, but clouds started to move in and by the time we set off, there was high cloud cover. It remained dry until lunchtime, after which there was fairly steady rain.

We focused on the rice fields near the towns of Madrigalejo and Palazuelo, in the hope of seeing **Common Cranes** and we were not disappointed. During the day we must have seen over five or six thousand cranes, some as family groups of three or four, but also two very large flocks.



Adult and juvenile Common Crane

In the first area we explored, Casas del Hitos, the cranes were generally in small groups. As we watched we also had a lovely view of a male **Hen Harrier**, gently quartering the fields. There were flocks of **Spanish Sparrows** and in the fields a mixture of **Yellow** and **White Wagtails**, **Meadow** and **Water Pipits**.



Blue-headed form of Yellow Wagtail

From the dam wall of Sierra Brava reservoir, we could distantly see a flock of **Avocet**, a large group of **Common Shelduck** and rafts of distant duck, including **Pintail**, **Wigeon** and **Shoveler**.

We stopped for a welcome coffee and then proceeded on to the rice fields near Palazuelo. Here the flocks of cranes were much larger and there was also a larger number of waders present. These included large flocks of **Dunlin**, good numbers of **Little Stint**, a **Temminck's Stint** and parties of **Ringed**, **Little Ringed** and **Kentish Plovers**. Again, wagtails and pipits were also present and in the ditches we had brief, tantalizing views of **Bluethroat**, an out-of-season **Common Reed Warbler**, lots of **Common Chiffchaffs** and **Red Avadavats**.

At our lunch stop we could watch many of the above species from a single place. As the rain set in, we continued our tour, adding a **Stone Curlew** which was seen in flight. We made a quick stop at the Alcollarín Reservoir on our way back to base, simply to admire the raft of thousands of **Shoveler** – it was not easy in the rain and low cloud to see much more.

8th February 2025: Plains between Cáceres and Trujillo, Trujillo

It was a misty start as we set off, but by the time we had reached the plains just east of Cáceres we enjoyed sunny weather, and it remained so throughout the rest of the day.

At our very first spot we watched a flock of 35 **Great Bustard**, resplendent in the sunshine with the males already looking very colourful and one even getting in the mood for some display. Smaller birds were certainly not overlooked, with **Crested** and **Calandra Larks** in the fields and **Corn Buntings** and **Common Chiffchaff** everywhere along the fences. There were small groups of **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover**.

A mournful call from a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** helped us to locate it to the base of a eucalyptus tree and we had prolonged views of it, although distant. We continued along a track for a few kilometres, seeing a group of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and a female **Merlin** perched on a solitary stone in the middle of a field.

Back on the road heading towards the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we made another stop where a flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** erupted from the ground and then flew in all different directions, making their nasal calls.

After a coffee in the village, we returned to admire the view over the Tamuja River. It was perfect timing since as soon as we stopped, we found a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** flying overhead with some vultures. Over the next few minutes we watched it as it performed as skydance and then was mobbed furiously by a **Raven**. Only when it almost disappeared over the hillside did its patience snap and it saw off the **Raven** with a chase. From the vantage point we also saw a **Sparrowhawk** and several **Red Kites**. A **Woodlark** sang close-by, sometimes from a tree, sometimes from the sky above us.



Spanish Imperial Eagle and Raven

To the north of the village, beside the Magasca River we stopped for lunch. This again was a superb raptor viewing site. Another (possibly the same?) **Sparrowhawk** came close, as did **Black Vultures**, but we saw no fewer than three different **Golden Eagles**: two adults and an immature bird.

Back on the plains, the sun was high and a heat shimmer was starting. We had lovely views of a large flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, along with more **Lapwings** and **Golden Plovers**. A small but spectacular murmuration of starling occurred across the fields, perhaps they were reacting to a Merlin?

We headed to Trujillo, where we made a stop at the San Lazaro Park. Here the water level was high, but there were some smart **Little Grebes** and good numbers of **Common Coot** and **Moorhen**. At another pool on the other side of town there were five **Black-winged Stilts**. We made a final stop at the edge of the Belén Palms, hoping we might find a Great Spotted Cuckoo. No luck, but the magnificent view across the plains, and looking towards the snow-capped Gredos Mountains was a fine compensation.

9th February 2025: Garciaz, Campo Lugar, rice fields at Puebla de Alcollarín and Alcollarín



Spoonbills

It was a fine day, with little wind and just very high light clouds. We started with a very enjoyable and productive walk though some *dehesa* near Garciaz. One of the first birds we saw was a pair of **Cirl Bunting**, sadly rather briefly. As we walked **Woodlarks** were singing and **Iberian Magpies** were everywhere. **Jays** were calling as well. A **Nuthatch** and **Short-toed Treecreeper** were also present. As we returned to the car, we had a lovely view of a **Firecrest** busily foraging in a small holm oak.

We then headed down to the plains at Campo Lugar. A group of 14 **Great Bustard** were visible as we arrived. There were good numbers of four species of lark (**Calandra**, **Thekla**, **Crested**

and **Skylark**) and **Common Starlings** lined up on the fences. We could see to the south that there were groups of **Common Crane** taking advantage of the fine weather to embark on their northward migration.

After coffee nearby we made a return visit to the rice fields near Puebla de Alcollarín. Here we managed some views of **Bluethroat**, and enjoyed good numbers of wagtails and pipits. A **Temminck's Stint** showed very well feeding nearby. Amongst a large flock of **Black-headed Gulls** we found an adult **Mediterranean Gull**. Despite the earlier departure of some groups, there were still very large flocks of **Common Crane** on the fields around us.

We completed the day at the Alcollarín Reservoir. It was a very peaceful afternoon and the hundreds of ducks were drifting in rafts in the middle of the lake. There were several flocks of **Common Greenshank**, numbering in total over a hundred birds and John also found a **Black-necked Grebe**.

10th February 2025: Arrocampo and Monfragüe National Park

We arrived at the Arrocampo Reservoir in thick fog, but as we set off for our walk beside the marsh, the fog slowly thinned-out and by the end of our sojourn there were even periods of sunshine. The reason for the fog, the complete lack of wind, made the conditions excellent for this habitat.

In the reeds there were numerous **Common Chiffchaffs** feeding and from its midst we could hear **Little Bittern**. A group of **Black-crowned Night Heron** perched stooped in their roosting tree. A **Kingfisher** zoomed past. We reached the hide overlooking the marsh and spent almost an hour there. We were rewarded with views of **Western Swamphen** and also an obliging **Bluethroat** which came out to feed on the track beside us. A **Penduline Tit** was only seen from afar. **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were present at intervals along our walk, one was interacting quite aggressively with a **Common Magpie**.



Bluethroat

From our coffee spot, we heard a **Wryneck** singing and found it perched in a bare tree beside the municipal swimming pool!

We made a further stop beside a reed-fringed pool which was alive with **Barn Swallows**, several of them recently fledged. A **Ruff** was present close to some sleeping **Spoonbills**, and several **Green Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper** and a **Water Pipit**.

We proceeded to the Monfragüe National Park, where 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 also enjoying its lunch on the riverbank. A few **Griffon Vultures** soared over the rocks. **Blue Rock Thrush** flew out to catch insects. An unseen **Eagle Owl** hooted a couple of times, and **Angel's Tears Narcissus** were in bloom on the hillside. A lovely spot.

We made a second stop at the Puerto de Serrania, where a **Bonelli's Eagle** was soaring in a group of **Griffon Vultures**. Our visit was completed at 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 catching a glimpse of a **Golden Eagle** being mobbed by a **Peregrine**. **Black Redstarts** were feeding just below where we stood.

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

11th February 2025: Montánchez Castle, Santa Amalia, Orellana Reservoir and rice fields of Vegas Altas

The day dawned fine, but with a fresh, rather chilly wind. It bore the clouds that gathered midday and brought rain during the whole afternoon.



Alpine Accentor

We spent the first part of the morning at Montánchez Castle. It boasted great views across the landscape, over the red-tiled roofs of the village and across the sierras and plains towards Trujillo and Cáceres. The windy conditions hampered the pleasure of the visit, but eventually we managed a brief view of an **Alpine Accentor**, wonderfully camouflaged on the wall of the castle. A **Blue Rock Thrush** was present, as well as groups of **Goldfinches**, **Linnets** and **Greenfinch**.

We stopped for coffee near Miajadas and then spent the rest of the morning on the rice fields near Santa Amalia, there were large groups of **Common Crane** and also flocks of **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover**.

We then headed west chasing the last of the sunny weather. We stopped for a picnic beside a pool near the Orellana Reservoir, where there were parties of **Gadwall**, **Coot** and **Great Crested Grebe**. By the time we had finished, the rain had set in. We spent the afternoon driving through the rice fields near Vegas Altas and Madrigalejo. There were wonderful numbers of **Common Cranes**, mostly in large flocks. We had a good view of a **Black-winged Kite** on a tree in front of us, and then a few minutes later we saw a second bird. The conditions made it difficult to scrutinise the rice fields for other birds, so by 16.00 we decided to throw in the towel and return to base.



Common Cranes in the rain

12th February 2025: Alange, Guadiana River at Mérida, Lobón and Trujillo

After the heavy rain last night, the day dawned clear with just some scattered cloud. There was however a fairly strong breeze all day, but not as chilly as yesterday.

We headed south-west, onto the motorway in the direction of Mérida. About halfway on the journey, we saw an adult **Booted Eagle**, quite a surprise at this time of year. As we approached our destination of Alange, a juvenile **Bonelli's Eagle** drifted over some tress, then to be mobbed by an irate **Marsh Harrier**.

At Alange **House Martins** were busy working on their nests where we parked. We enjoyed an excellent walk from the town towards the rocky outcrop to the west, seeing within just a few minutes our target bird, a pair of **Black Wheatear**. They afforded us good views, as did several other species there: **Thekla Lark**, **Dartford** and **Sardinian Warblers**, **Rock Bunting** and **Blue Rock Thrush**.



Caspian Tern

We had coffee in the town and then drove toward Mérida itself. We stopped beside the Guadiana River just north of the town. Here there was a gathering of gulls, and we found amongst them a fine **Caspian Tern**, with its enormous heavy red bill.

Very pleased, we continued along the Guadiana River to the area near Lobón where John found a roosting **Eagle Owl**, which gave us superb views. Our daily **Kingfisher** was there too! This was a good spot for lunch. Returning to Mérida afterwards, we stopped to look at the gulls again, seeing the **Caspian Tern** again. At one point all the gulls flew up in panic as an **Osprey** flew past. Just before we left, we heard and had brief views of a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**.

We completed the day in Trujillo, stopping at the San Lazaro Park and then at the silos. At the latter site, three **Lesser Kestrels** were back for the spring.

13th February 2025: Miravete Pass and onward to Madrid

The dawn was clear and still, with a touch of ice on the car windscreen. The weather remained fine all day for our return to Madrid. However, there was time, after bidding farewell to Claudia and Casa Rural El Recuerdo, to spend half an hour at the Miravete Pass. Here we had excellent panoramic views north to the snow-clad Gredos Mountains. Before the mountains lay the Tiétar and Tagus valleys, with Arrocampo visible, although partially covered by a bank of fog.

At the pass we found a good array of species, including a **Crested Tit**. But pride of place was a pair of **Cirl Buntings**, with the male in particular showing very well as it foraged on the ground.

We then returned to the motorway and headed north-east. A few **Common Cranes** were seen in the *dehesa*, **Red Kites** overhead and some **Monk Parakeets** as we entered the city. We reached the airport just after 12.30, the end of a very productive late winter holiday with a superb total of 140 species recorded.

BIRDS SEEN OR HEARD

1. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on four days
2. **Common Shelduck**: Seen at Sierra Brava and on the rice fields.
3. **Wigeon**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarín.
4. **Gadwall**: Seen on four days.
5. **Eurasian Teal**: Seen on four days.
6. **Pintail**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarín.
7. **Mallard**: Seen daily.
8. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarín.
9. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on four days.
10. **Little Grebe**: Seen on five days.
11. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alange, Sierra Brava and Alcollarín
12. **Black-necked Grebe**: Seen at Alcollarín
13. **Great Cormorant**: Seen every day.
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 almost every day.
18. **Great White Egret**: Seen almost every day
19. **Grey Heron**: Seen daily.
20. **White Stork**: Seen daily.
21. **Glossy Ibis**: Seen on three days.
22. **Spoonbill**: Seen on the rice fields and Alcollarín.
23. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
24. **Black Vulture**: Seen on plains and Monfragüe.
25. **Osprey**: One seen at Mérida.
26. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: A pair seen at River Tamuja.
27. **Golden Eagle**: Three at River Magasca.
28. **Bonelli's Eagle**: Seen in Monfragüe and near Alange.
29. **Booted Eagle**: One near Miajadas.
30. **Red Kite**: Seen every day.
31. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen every day.
32. **Hen Harrier**: Seen on the rice fields.
33. **Common Buzzard**: Seen every day.
34. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen near Santa Marta de Magasca.
35. **Black-winged Kite**: Two seen near Madrigalejo.
36. **Lesser Kestrel**: Three at Trujillo.
37. **Common Kestrel**: Seen every day.
38. **Merlin**: One on the plains.
39. **Peregrine**: Seen at Monfragüe.

40. **Water Rail:** Heard on two days.
41. **Common Moorhen:** Seen on five days.
42. **Western Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
43. **Common Coot:** Seen at Alcollarín and Trujillo.
44. **Common Crane:** Seen in thousands at the rice fields.
45. **Great Bustard:** Flocks seen on plains east of Cáceres and Campo Lugar.
46. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on five days.
47. **Stone Curlew:** One seen on rice fields.
48. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen on three days.
49. **Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
50. **Kentish Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
51. **Golden Plover:** Seen on the rice fields and the plains.
52. **Lapwing:** Seen every day.
53. **Dunlin:** Large flocks on the rice fields.
54. **Little Stint:** Seen on the rice fields.
55. **Temminck's Stint:** One seen on the rice fields.
56. **Ruff:** Seen at Arrocampo and on the rice fields.
57. **Common Snipe:** Seen at Arrocampo and the rice fields.
58. **Greenshank:** Seen on the rice fields, Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
59. **Green Sandpiper:** Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.
60. **Common Sandpiper:** Seen at Arrocampo.
61. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** Seen most days.
62. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen every day.
63. **Mediterranean Gull:** One on the rice fields.
64. **Caspian Tern:** One at Mérida.
65. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
66. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on the plains.
67. **Feral Pigeon:** Seen daily.
68. **Common Woodpigeon:** Seen almost daily.
69. **Collared Dove:** Seen daily.
70. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** One seen on the plains east of Cáceres.
71. **Monk Parakeet:** Seen in Madrid.
72. **Eagle Owl:** Heard at Monfragüe and seen at Lobón.
73. **Little Owl:** Seen on the plains.
74. **Kingfisher:** Seen every day.
75. **Hoopoe:** Seen every day.
76. **Wryneck:** One seen at Arrocampo.
77. **Great Spotted Woodpecker:** Heard at Miravete Pass.
78. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** One at Mérida.
79. **Calandra Lark:** Seen on the plains.
80. **Crested Lark:** Seen every day.
81. **Thekla Lark:** Seen at Alange, Alcollarín and on the plains.
82. **Skylark:** Seen on the plains.
83. **Crag Martin:** Seen most days.
84. **Barn Swallow:** Seen daily.
85. **House Martin:** Seen daily.
86. **Meadow Pipit:** Seen most days.
87. **Water Pipit:** Seen on the rice fields and Arrocampo.

88. **Grey Wagtail:** Seen on four days.
89. **Yellow Wagtail:** Seen on the plains.
90. **White Wagtail:** Seen very day. A "Pied Wagtail" seen in Trujillo.
91. **Wren:** Singing in the garden.
92. **Dunnoek:** Calling at Miravete pass.
93. **Alpine Accentor:** One at Montánchez.
94. **Robin:** Seen daily.
95. **Bluethroat:** Seen well at Arrocampo, also present on the rice fields.
96. **Black Redstart:** Seen every day.
97. **Stonechat:** Seen daily.
98. **Black Wheatear:** A pair at Alange.
99. **Blue Rock Thrush:** Seen at Alange, Monfragüe and Miravete.
100. **Blackbird:** Seen daily.
101. **Song Thrush:** Seen almost daily.
102. **Mistle Thrush:** Seen on three days.
103. **Cetti's Warbler:** Recorded almost every day.
104. **Zitting Cisticola:** Seen almost every day.
105. **Common Reed Warbler:** One on the rice fields.
106. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen at Alange and heard near Santa Marta de Magasca.
107. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen almost daily.
108. **Blackcap:** Seen daily.
109. **Common Chiffchaff:** Seen daily.
110. **Firecrest:** One seen near Garciaz.
111. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen on two days.
112. **Crested Tit:** One at Miravete Pass.
113. **Blue Tit:** Seen most days.
114. **Great Tit:** Seen most days.
115. **Nuthatch:** Heard at Garciaz and Monfragüe.
116. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Recorded on three days.
117. **Penduline Tit:** Seen at Arrocampo.
118. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen daily.
119. **Jay:** Recorded at Garciaz.
120. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen daily.
121. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
122. **Jackdaw:** Seen almost daily.
123. **Raven:** Seen most days.
124. **Common Starling:** Seen on the plains.
125. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
126. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
127. **Spanish Sparrow:** Seen most days.
128. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on two days.
129. **Rock Sparrow:** Seen at Garciaz.
130. **Red Avadavat:** Seen on the rice fields and at Arrocampo.
131. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on the rice fields.
132. **Chaffinch:** Seen most days.
133. **Serin:** Seen daily.
134. **Greenfinch:** Seen most days.
135. **Goldfinch:** Seen almost every day.

- 136. **Linnet:** Seen on four days.
- 137. **Hawfinch:** Seen daily.
- 138. **Cirl Bunting:** Seen at Garciaz and Miravete Pass.
- 139. **Rock Bunting:** Seen at Alange.
- 140. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Mammals

Fox

Otter

Red Deer

Iberian Hare

Reptiles

Western Psammodromus

Spanish Terrapin