

# BIRDING EXTREMADURA



EARLY WINTER IN EXTREMADURA FOR HILARY AND LIN

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

8<sup>th</sup> December – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2025



*On the Roman Bridge at Mérida*

## Itinerary

8<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Collection from Madrid

9<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Alange, Mérida and Montánchez

10<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo and Alcollarín

**11<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Arrocampo, Monfragüe and Jaraicejo**

**12<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Free Day**

**13<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres and Parque de Principe in Cáceres**

**14<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Return to Madrid**

## TRIP REPORT

**8<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Collection from Madrid**

Hilary and Lin arrived on schedule at Madrid airport and Martin was there to greet them. We headed off at 12.40, seeing **Monk Parakeets** and an **Iberian Green Woodpecker** in the airport carpark. The traffic was light on the ring-road and as we headed out of Madrid on the motorway to Extremadura, we could see the multitude of cars returning to Madrid after the holiday weekend. The contraflow system was being set off to alleviate the congestion later in the day and we were in single file for the first one hundred kilometres. Just out of Madrid, we stopped for a delicious Iberian ham roll at a busy bar. We then continued through to Extremadura, seeing **White Stork** and **Red Kite** on the way. We stopped at the Arrocampo Reservoir, spending an hour late afternoon at one of the hides overlooking the marsh. The conditions were excellent and dozens of **Common Chiffchaffs** were making short sallies to catch small insects. We saw **Cetti's Warblers**, **Stonechats**, **Spoonbills** and **Little Egrets**. Most of the birds though were heard rather than seen or just seen rather briefly: these included **Penduline Tit**, **Bearded Tit** and **Reed Bunting**.

We then continued to Casa Rural El Recuerdo, being greeted by Claudia on arrival at about 17.45.

**9<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Alange, Mérida and Montánchez**

The day started clear and calm and remained so until early afternoon when the wind freshened and the skies darkened. As we returned to base at the end of the afternoon it started to rain and rain continued through the night.

We drove south of Mérida to the spa town of Alange where we stopped for coffee and then a very productive short walk beside the town, overlooking the reservoir. The rocky habitat was very rich in birds, with a total of six **Black Wheatear**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Sardinian Warbler** and **Thekla Lark** seen extremely well. There was a fine supporting cast of **Black Redstart**, **Serins** and overhead **Griffon** and **Black Vultures**.

We then drove into Mérida and took a walk over the amazing Roman Bridge. From this two-thousand-year-old structure we saw a **Little Bittern** and **Purple Swamphen**, as well as birds like **Great Crested Grebe**, a single **Glossy Ibis** and a solitary **Monk Parakeet**.

Stopping beside the Guadiana River in Mérida, we had our picnic and then looked at the large gull flock present, mainly **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, but also some **Black-headed** and a **Yellow-legged Gull** too. We found another **Purple Swamphen**, as well as **Great White Egret**.

We then drove back towards Trujillo with a stop at the castle of Montánchez. We were able to enjoy lovely views of the landscape all around. The weather conditions had deteriorated with

very strong winds. We put in some effort to search for Alpine Accentor but sadly failed. However a fine **Blue Rock Thrush** was very satisfying. There were also **Greenfinch**, **Serins**, **Linnets** and **Black Redstart**.

On our return, we stopped to look at a field full of **Lapwing**, where **Golden Plover** were also present and were rewarded by a prolonged view of a young male **Hen Harrier**.



*Male Sardinian Warbler at Alange*

#### **10<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Campo Lugar, Madrigalejo and Alcollarín**

It rained throughout the night, but was dry, although heavily overcast as we left. There were rainy periods during the day, but we managed to stay out of the heavier showers.

We travelled southwards, entering the Guadiana watershed and stopping first beside the village of Campo Lugar. Here we watched a winter roosting flock of **Stone Curlew** in a small orchard. Beyond lay the plains and making a stop here gave us the chance to get good views of a flock of male **Great Bustards**. This was a very satisfying find indeed. We then stopped beside the dam at the Sierra Brava reservoir and the opportunity to understand the transformation of the land to the south of us to irrigated agriculture. As we moved onto the rice stubble fields we started to see **Common Cranes** in flocks of varying sizes. Within one flock we found three **Ruddy Shelduck** too.

Rain had started and the timing was perfect for us to withdraw indoors to have a coffee in Madrigalejo. We then moved onto the rice fields to the west of the town, where we spent most of the afternoon. Again, **Common Cranes** were everywhere, and we also found several tractors working to mash-up the stubble and thus creating a feeding bonanza for egrets, herons, **Spoonbills**, **Glossy Ibis**, gulls and both **White** and **Yellow Wagtails**. We had our picnic in the shelter of some tumbledown farm buildings and then proceeded. There were several large

flocks of **Spanish Sparrows**, as well as **Tree Sparrows** and groups of **Red Avadavats**. Flocks of **Dunlin** swirled around, and we also came across a good selection of other waders such as **Spotted Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Kentish** and **Ringed Plovers**. **Little Stints** were sometimes found amongst the **Dunlin** flocks. We spent some time looking for **Water Pipit** and eventually found some very obliging individuals.



*Spoonbill at Alcollarín*

We left the rice fields and made our final stop at the subsidiary dam at Alcollarín. There were perhaps a hundred **Crag Martin** hawking insects there and amongst them was a **House Martin** and two **Pallid Swifts**. Duck numbers were low, but there was nevertheless a good selection, including **Shoveler**, **Teal**, **Pochard** and **Tufted Duck**. A **Common Sandpiper** landed and foraged close to us and we had superb views of a perched **Kingfisher**.

#### **11<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Arrocampo, Monfragüe and Jaraicejo**

The day dawned fine with a clear sky and no wind. It gradually became more overcast in the afternoon with some light rain as we were returning to base.

We started with a return visit to the Arrocampo Reservoir where we had a walk beside the marsh for an hour or so. It was rather quiet for birds, although we did add **Barn Swallow**, **Zitting Cisticola** and **Grey Wagtail** to the holiday list and had some excellent views of **Purple Swamphen**. A **Sparrowhawk** circled overhead as we left for coffee.

We continued onward to the Monfragüe National Park, making two stops. One, at the Portilla del Tiétar, is where the Tiétar River cuts through hard quartzite rock, making a gateway or “Portilla”. Both **Griffon** and **Black Vultures** were sentinel on the rock face and we enjoyed watching a flotilla of **Great Cormorant** and their accompanying egrets as they pursued a shoal of fish in the river below us.

Our second stop was at the Salto del Gitano where the mighty Tagus River leaves the park, cutting through the hard quartzite to produce the massive cliff, Peña Falcón. Here there were easily over two hundred **Griffon Vultures** soaring against increasingly leaden skies. One was seen carrying nest material and we could hear mating pairs. **Blackcaps**, **Song Thrushes** and **Blackbirds** were feeding on the wild olives.



*Peña Falcón in Monfragüe*

We left the park and drove through a vast *dehesa* landscape to the village of Jaraicejo, then taking the old road over the Miravete Pass. Here we searched, in vain, for Crested Tit, but did find several **Woodlarks**. We then explored a lovely area of cork oak, where apart from **Red Deer**, it seemed quite quiet.

#### **12<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Free Day**

Hilary and Lin enjoyed a day exploring Trujillo.

#### **13<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Plains between Trujillo and Cáceres and Parque de Principe in Cáceres**

It was a day of magnificent weather, with blue skies, with fascinating cloud formations including lenticular clouds in the morning, formed by the fresh north-easterly wind. This gave us great visibility, but it did mean that there was a bit of wind chill effect.

We started on the plains north of Trujillo, where we had a lovely walk along an ancient drovers' trail. There were flocks of **Lapwing**, mixed with **Spotless Starlings**, and skeins of **Golden Plover** passing overhead. On our arrival we watched a group of **Wild Boar** running across a distant field. This put up a flock of 14 **Little Bustard**. They circled and then landed in tall dry vegetation. A larger flock of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** was also flushed by the boars.

Along the walk, we saw a larger flock of **Little Bustard** and more **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**.

We then made a stop at the small village of Santa Marta de Magasca where we had coffee in the busy little bar in the square. Just south of the village is the River Tamuja and here we parked overlooking the deep valley. Our timing was perfect, since upon arrival we quickly found a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles**. What ensued over the minutes that unfolded was superb. One of the birds, probably the bigger female, made a stoop in an attempt to take a passing **Woodpigeon** from a flock. We saw the birds displaying. Then one of them perched wonderfully. Finally, to crown it all, one of them mobbed and chased off a **Golden Eagle**. Even so, the show was not over, as a third **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, this time a juvenile, flew in and soared together with the pair. Incredible!



*The eagle fest at Tamuja River*

We entered the plains again and had our lunch in the shelter of a hide, overlooking the expanse of the landscape. Larks were much in evidence: four species! It was particularly good to see **Thekla** and **Crested Larks** together. We found a party of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** on the ground. Another juvenile **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was seen. Nearby we took a short walk and had a wonderful encounter with a male **Marsh Harrier**.

We then changed scene and entered the city of Cáceres for a walk in the park, specifically the Parque del Principe. This proved a goldmine. We had great views of **Iberian Magpies** and **Hawfinches**, a male **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, a **Firecrest** and even, surprisingly, a **Pied Flycatcher**. It was a beautiful walk, and the park was almost deserted, despite it being a Saturday afternoon.

We completed the afternoon on the plains again, this time just west of Trujillo. **Calandra Larks** sang above us and we found a group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** on the ground. Nearby, amongst

the **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover**, we found two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** as well. We had completed all the typical species of birds of the open plains of Extremadura!



*An aseasonal Pied Flycatcher*

#### **14<sup>th</sup> December 2025: Return to Madrid**

We left before dawn, at 06.45 and arrived at 09.45 at Terminal 1 of Madrid Airport, with ample time for check-in.

#### **BIRDS SEEN**

1. **Grey Lag Goose**: Seen at Alange.
2. **Egyptian Goose**: Seen on two days.
3. **Ruddy Shelduck**: Seen on the rice fields.
4. **Eurasian Teal**: Seen at Alcollarín.
5. **Mallard**: Seen on three days.
6. **Northern Shoveler**: Seen at Alcollarín.
7. **Common Pochard**: Seen at Alcollarín.
8. **Tufted Duck**: Seen at Alcollarín.
9. **Red-legged Partridge**: Seen on the plains.
10. **Little Grebe**: Seen on one day.
11. **Great Crested Grebe**: Seen at Alange.
12. **Great Cormorant**: Seen almost every day.
13. **Little Bittern**: Seen at Mérida.
14. **Cattle Egret**: Seen on five days.
15. **Little Egret**: Seen on four days.

16. **Great Egret**: Seen on three days.
17. **Grey Heron**: Seen almost every day.
18. **White Stork**: Seen every day.
19. **Glossy Ibis**: Hundreds strong in the rice fields.
20. **Spoonbill**: Seen on two days.
21. **Griffon Vulture**: Seen almost every day.
22. **Black Vulture**: Seen on three days.
23. **Spanish Imperial Eagle**: Three or four seen at River Tamuja and on the plains.
24. **Golden Eagle**: Seen at River Tamuja.
25. **Red Kite**: Seen daily.
26. **Marsh Harrier**: Seen almost daily.
27. **Hen Harrier**: Seen on the plains.
28. **Common Buzzard**: Seen every day.
29. **Sparrowhawk**: Seen on three days.
30. **Common Kestrel**: Seen every day.
31. **Water Rail**: Recorded on three days.
32. **Moorhen**: Seen and heard at several places.
33. **Purple Swamphen**: Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
34. **Common Coot**: Seen at Alange.
35. **Common Crane**: Seen almost every day.
36. **Little Bustard**: Seen on the plains near Cáceres and Trujillo.
37. **Great Bustard**: Seen on the plains near Campo Lugar.
38. **Black-winged Stilt**: Seen on two days.
39. **Stone Curlew**: Seen at Campo Lugar.
40. **Little Ringed Plover**: Seen on the rice fields.
41. **Ringed Plover**: Seen on the rice fields.
42. **Kentish Plover**: Seen on the rice fields.
43. **Golden Plover**: Seen on the rice fields and the plains.
44. **Northern Lapwing**: Seen almost every day.
45. **Dunlin**: Seen on the rice fields.
46. **Little Stint**: Seen on the rice fields.
47. **Common Snipe**: Seen on two days.
48. **Spotted Redshank**: Seen on the rice fields.
49. **Common Redshank**: Seen on the rice fields.
50. **Greenshank**: Seen on the rice fields.
51. **Green Sandpiper**: Seen on two days.
52. **Common Sandpiper**: Seen at Alcollarín.
53. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Seen on three days.
54. **Yellow-legged Gull**: One seen at Mérida.
55. **Black-headed Gull**: Seen daily.
56. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**: Seen on the plains.
57. **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**: Seen on the plains in large numbers.
58. **Feral Pigeon**: Seen daily.
59. **Wood Pigeon**: Seen almost daily.
60. **Collared Dove**: Seen almost daily.
61. **Pallid Swift**: Two seen at Alcollarín.
62. **Kingfisher**: Seen on two days.
63. **Monk Parakeet**: Seen in Madrid and Mérida.

64. **Hoopoe**: Seen every day.
65. **Iberian Green Woodpecker**: One seen at Madrid airport.
66. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen in Cáceres.
67. **Calandra Lark**: Seen on the plains.
68. **Crested Lark**: Seen daily.
69. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on two days.
70. **Woodlark**: Seen near Jaraicejo.
71. **Skylark**: Seen on the plains.
72. **Crag Martin**: Seen on three days.
73. **Barn Swallow**: Seen at Arrocampo.
74. **House Martin**: Seen at Alcollarín.
75. **Meadow Pipit**: Seen daily.
76. **Water Pipit**: Seen on the rice fields.
77. **Yellow Wagtail**: Seen on the rice fields
78. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen on two days.
79. **White Wagtail**: Seen daily.
80. **Wren**: Recorded on two days.
81. **Robin**: Seen daily.
82. **Bluethroat**: Seen briefly on two days.
83. **Black Redstart**: Seen daily.
84. **Stonechat**: Seen daily.
85. **Pied Flycatcher**: One seen in Cáceres.
86. **Black Wheatear**: Seen at Alange.
87. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen at Alange.
88. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
89. **Song Thrush**: Seen almost daily.
90. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded most days.
91. **Zitting Cisticola**: Recorded two days.
92. **Dartford Warbler**: Recorded two days.
93. **Sardinian Warbler**: Seen almost every day.
94. **Blackcap**: Seen almost daily.
95. **Chiffchaff**: Seen every day.
96. **Firecrest**: Seen in Cáceres.
97. **Long-tailed Tit**: Seen on three days.
98. **Blue Tit**: Seen on two days.
99. **Great Tit**: Seen on three days.
100. **Penduline Tit**: Seen at Arrocampo.
101. **Iberian Grey Shrike**: Seen daily.
102. **Iberian Magpie**: Seen daily.
103. **Magpie**: Seen daily.
104. **Jackdaw**: Seen almost daily.
105. **Raven**: Seen almost daily.
106. **Common Starling**: Seen on the plains.
107. **Spotless Starling**: Seen daily.
108. **House Sparrow**: Seen daily.
109. **Spanish Sparrow**: Seen on several days, with big flocks on the rice fields.
110. **Tree Sparrow**: Seen on the rice fields.
111. **Red Avadavat**: Seen on rice fields.

- 112. **Common Waxbill**: Seen on two days.
- 113. **Chaffinch**: Seen almost daily.
- 114. **Serin**: Seen on two days.
- 115. **Greenfinch**: Seen on three days.
- 116. **Goldfinch**: Seen almost daily.
- 117. **Siskin**: Heard on two days.
- 118. **Linnet**: Seen on two days.
- 119. **Hawfinch**: Seen in Cáceres.
- 120. **Reed Bunting**: Seen at Arrocampo.
- 121. **Corn Bunting**: Seen almost daily.

#### **MAMMALS SEEN**

Fox

Iberian hare

Rabbit

Wild Boar

Red Deer