

BIRDING EXTREMADURA



SUMMER IN EXTREMADURA FOR SARAH AND MARK

Casa Rural El Recuerdo and Birding Extremadura

23rd May – 29th May 2026



Itinerary

23rd May 2026: Pick up from Madrid and Arrocampo

24th May: Campo Lugar plains, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Alcollarín Reservoir

25th May 2026: Monfragüe National Park

26th May 2026: Roman Bridge Merida, Alange and the Rice Fields

27th May 2026: Arrocampo, Jerte Valley and Tornovacas

28th May 2026: La Plataforma and Tormes valley

29th May 2026. Peña Negra, Puerto del Pico, southern Gredos and return to Madrid

TRIP REPORT

23rd May 2026: Pick up from Madrid and Arrocampo

Martin met Sarah and Mark at Terminal One. It was a hot and sunny morning, and the traffic was reasonable on the ring road and lightened up further as we headed out of Madrid on motorway. Onward, we moved away from the open arable land of La Mancha to landscapes which would presage the typical landscape of much of Extremadura: the wood pasture dominated by holm oaks. To the north, the impressive Gredos Mountains showed that there was still some snow on the highest peaks.

After an excellent snack, we stopped at the Arrocampo Reservoir. **Reed Warblers**, **Great Reed Warblers** and **Savi's Warblers** were singing, and we had good views of the latter as well as **Cetti's Warblers** and **Zitting Cisticolas**. Overhead there were many **Black Kite**. We watched **Purple Herons** come into their nesting colony and saw egrets crossing our view. **White Storks** bill-clacked. Just after 15.15, we moved on, reaching Casa Rural El Recuerdo at about 16.00 to be welcomed by Claudia.

24th May 2026: Campo Lugar plains, rice fields near Madrigalejo and Alcollarín Reservoir

It was a hot and sunny day, so we made the best of the morning before the heat became too overwhelming. Heading south of Zorita, crossing the plains, we descended to the edge of the rice fields and made an initial check through an area of rough pasture, scattered trees and fruit orchards for the local Black-winged Kite. We were unlucky in that respect but did have fabulous views of **Iberian Grey Shrike** and **Bee-eaters**. We then returned to the plains for a lovely walk along a dirt track. We saw two **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** in flight and several **Rollers** and **Lesser Kestrels**. A **Short-toed Eagle** was spotted perched on a pylon. **Calandra Larks** were all around us and we were also able to get excellent sightings of **Thekla** and **Crested Larks**. But perhaps best of all was a very obliging **Three-toed Skink** which stayed motionless on the track.



Three-toed Skink

After coffee at the village of Campo Lugar, we paid a quick visit to the Alcollarín Reservoir before it became too hot. There were flocks of **Egyptian Geese** and **Grey Lag Geese**, few **Mallard** and **Gadwall**. Returning to the rice fields we stopped for our picnic beside the River Ruercas, where a **Golden Oriole** was singing as we arrived. There were groups of **Common Waxbill**. We then spent a couple of hours searching the rice fields, finding **Iberian Yellow Wagtails**, and eventually a flock of **Black-winged Stilts** and **Common Ringed Plovers**, as well as a few **Tree Sparrows**. Stopping further along the River Ruercas, we had a brief, but useful comparison in size of **Reed** and **Great Reed Warblers**. By now it was the high thirties, so time to make our way back to base and some cool shade.

25th May 2026: Monfragüe National Park

Another hot and sunny day, and we headed to the Monfragüe National park. Our first stop climbing up onto the castle ridge and thence to the castle itself. This gave us an unbroken view of 360°, from the Gredos Mountains to the north to the *dehesas* southwards to Trujillo and beyond. **Griffon Vultures** glided past us and amongst the throngs of **House Martins**, we saw a pair of **White-rumped Swifts**. Our next stop was at the iconic viewpoint of Salto de Gitano. We had a very productive stay here, seeing **Griffon Vultures** at their nests, but also **Black Storks** at their too. **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstarts** and **Rock Bunting** were singing, sometimes using the same rock, but not all at the same time. A **Peregrine** was present at times, dwarfed by the surrounding vultures.



Two-tailed Pasha

We took a short walk beside the Tagus River at the edge of the mixed *umbria* forest. Here we had superb views of **Two-tailed Pasha**, **Large Tortoiseshell** and **Spanish Purple Hairstreak**. Several **Bosca's Newts** were in drinking troughs. **Alpine Swifts** were amongst the numerous **House Martins**. After coffee in the hamlet of Villareal de San Carlos, we saw a male **Golden Oriole** fly from a mulberry tree, we stopped at the Puerta de Serrana. Here we had glimpses of **Subalpine Warbler**, and more **Alpine Swifts**.

We headed through the park, stopping to watch a lovely pair of **Black-eared Wheatear** and then having our picnic beside the River Tiétar. We completed our visit at the Portilla del Tiétar watching again, but at closer range, a **Griffon Vulture** colony, with young at different ages. An **Egyptian Vulture** was also seen here and nearby we saw an adult sitting on a nest. A **Great Horseshoe Bat** was seen hanging in the shade of the observation hide.

26th May 2026: Roman Bridge Merida, Alange and the Rice Fields

The heatwave continued, but by setting off early, we were able to make the most of the day. Driving across to Santa Cruz de la Sierra, we then joined the motorway for Mérida, entering after Miajadas the irrigated floodplains of the Guadiana River, dominated by tomato, maize, rice and fruit fields. Mérida is the capital of Extremadura and we parked on the western side of the river to cross the two-thousand-year-old Roman Bridge. This superb piece of architecture also offered excellent birding. Three species of swift were watched: **Alpine**, **Pallid** and a few **Common Swifts**. **Cattle Egrets** and **Glossy Ibis** passed overhead. We were very pleased to find a female **Little Bittern** which gave us superb views and then were more delighted still to watch an **Otter**!



Alpine Swift

Entering the park, we spent several minutes watching a family party of **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers**. Nearby was the egretty on an island near the modern Lusitanian Bridge. Here **Cattle Egrets**, **Little Egrets**, **Glossy Ibis** and **Spoonbill** were all nesting. Returning on the Roman Bridge, we saw **Black-crowned Night Heron** too.

After a welcome coffee, we drove south of Mérida beside the Guadiana River. We stopped at an area called the Fábrica de Luz. Here we watched a delightful family of **Long-tailed Tits** and had brief views of a **Western Olivaceous Warbler**. Just a few minutes further south was the dam of Alange. Here we had our picnic and then watched a male **Black Wheatear**, close to a male **Blue Rock Thrush**.

We spent the afternoon crossing the rice fields, some of which, at last, were being flooded. We failed to find any Pratincoles but did see more **Black-winged Stilts** and a small group of **Lapwing** too.

27th May 2026: Arrocampo, Jerte Valley and Tornovacas

We bade farewell to Casa Rural El Recuerdo and to Claudia and left shortly after 08:00. We made our first stop on the west side of the Arrocampo Reservoir. A group of **Ferruginous Ducks** were in a small pool. Beside a large pool, at the edge of a large field we were enthralled by the sight of a family of **Black-winged Kites**. There were four juveniles, one tearing a small rodent to pieces, and an adult. The latter hovered close to us on one occasion. The morning light was perfect and the bird, despite being close to us, ignored us completely. It was a delight watching them. As we stood a male **Honey Buzzard** circled overhead. A **Spoonbill** also flew over. What an excellent start to the day. At our next stop we watched a **Squacco Heron** fishing and had amazing views of a juvenile **Great Spotted Cuckoo**.

We then went to the main marsh where we saw another **Squacco Heron**. A **Black-crowned Night Heron** flew above us and a **Little Bittern** dropped into the reeds. Eventually we all got good sightings of **Purple Swamphens** too.

After coffee and watching the **Barn Swallows** escaping the heat by perching on the beams in a sports pavilion, we started our journey to the mountains. We rose to El Pitolito, north of Plasencia. Here we had our picnic surrounded by amazingly long-distance views. There had been a fire a year ago which had destroyed the tussocks of gorse, but on the bare ground there was a wonderful show of flowers blooming. Butterflies were also in abundance.



Jerte valley

We descended to the Jerte Valley, Spain's most important cherry-growing area. Terraces climbed both sides of the valley, and the trees were laden with fruit. At the head of the valley was the pass where we crossed from Extremadura to Castille y Leon. We had a productive walk here with another **Honey Buzzard** and a selection of warblers including **Melodious**, **Dartford** and **Common Whitethroat**. A male **Red-backed Shrike** was also seen. It was then about an hour's drive onward to our hotel Almanzor. We arrived just before 17.00 to the sound of **Western Bonelli's Warblers**.

28th May 2026: La Plataforma and Tormes valley

It was a beautiful start to the day with clear skies, a luxurious freshness in the mountain air and the view across to the patches of snow in the highest peaks. **Western Bonelli's Warblers** were singing in the garden. After breakfast we drove up to the Plataforma, the high elevation car park where the trail starts to the highest points in the range. Below us, in the Tormes valley, the pine pollen being blown from the trees gave the appearance of smoke from a forest fire, or an immense dust storm. **Spanish Ibex** sat proud on the highest points of the smooth granite rock faces. We ascended the path, made of large granite stones, into high elevation meadow and broom scrub. **Northern Wheatears** performed sound flights above us, joining the **Skylarks** in their element. **Ortolan Buntings** gave their evocative low-key songs from boulders. **Iberian Yellow Wagtails** were also in song. We searched unsuccessfully for Bluethroat but had several views of the curious **Iberian Dunnocks**. As we made our descent we had a brief view of **Common Rock Thrush**. The work of a helicopter carrying building materials up to the Refuge from the car park was fun to watch but did create a bit of a noise.

We descended to Hoyos de Espino for coffee and a wee snack. From the bar's terrace there was an excellent view of the mountain range. We dropped down to the Tormes River where we did a circular walk. Several interesting butterflies were seen including **Glanville** and **Knapweed Fritillaries**, **Provence Orange-tip** and **Nettle-tree Butterfly**.



Pied Flycatcher

After our picnic in the shade of the pines, we drove to the Parador and took a circular walk in the habitat below the building. It was very productive with good views of **Pied Flycatcher**, **Crested Tit**, **Firecrest** and **Goldcrest**. Two **Citril Finches** were seen briefly. We returned to the hotel for a very welcome beer on the terrace.

29th May 2026. Peña Negra, Puerto del Pico, southern Gredos and return to Madrid

We bade farewell to Hostel Almansor and ascended to the Peña Negra Pass. Here there was a fabulous view of the Gredos range to the south. We stood amidst a vast area of broom, with **Common Whitethroat** and **Dunnock** singing from the tussocks. However, it was the **Bluethroat** that was our target species here and soon we had a lovely, prolonged view of a male singing from a top of a rock. Subsequently we saw a couple more. **Skylarks** sang around us and there were **Yellow Wagtails** as well. As we descended, we had great views of a **Red-backed Shrike**.

As we progressed to Madrid, we stopped at the Pico Pass, where a Roman Road climbs from the south and pantones through to Ávila. After coffee, we wandered around and found a clump of thistles attracting half a dozen **Cardinal** butterflies as well as **Queen of Spain** and **Glanville Fritillaries**.



Glanville Fritillary

Descending on the southern slopes of the Gredos, we stopped near the Aguila Caves for lunch and then a short walk. The extreme heat (high 30s) made it difficult to find much. But we did hear **Rock Sparrows** calling. We progressed to Madrid, seeing flocks of **Monk Parakeets** as we entered the city. We reached Madrid airport at about 17.30, the end of a very productive holiday spent in a huge variety of landscapes.

SPECIES SEEN

Birds

1. **Greylag Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín.
2. **Egyptian Goose:** Seen at Alcollarín.
3. **Gadwall:** Seen on two days.
4. **Mallard:** Seen almost daily.
5. **Ferruginous Duck:** Seen at Arrocampo.
6. **Quail:** Heard on three days.
7. **Little Grebe:** Heard at Madrigalejo.
8. **Great Cormorant:** Seen on three days.
9. **Little Bittern:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
10. **Black-crowned Night Heron:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
11. **Squacco Heron:** Seen at Arrocampo.
12. **Cattle Egret:** Seen on three days.
13. **Little Egret:** Seen on four days.
14. **Great Egret:** Seen on three days
15. **Grey Heron:** Seen on four days.
16. **Purple Heron:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
17. **Black Stork:** Seen at Monfragüe.
18. **White Stork:** Seen every day.
19. **Glossy Ibis:** Seen at Arrocampo and Mérida.
20. **Spoonbill:** Seen at Mérida and Arrocampo.
21. **Egyptian Vulture:** Seen at Monfragüe.
22. **Griffon Vulture:** Seen daily.
23. **Black Vulture:** Seen almost daily.
24. **Short-toed Eagle:** Seen at Campo Lugar.
25. **Booted Eagle:** Seen on five days.
26. **Black Kite:** Seen almost daily.
27. **Red Kite:** Seen on four days.
28. **Marsh Harrier:** Seen on four days.
29. **Common Buzzard:** Seen most days.
30. **Honey Buzzard:** Seen at Arrocampo and Tornovacas.
31. **Black-winged Kite:** Seen at Arrocampo.
32. **Lesser Kestrel:** Seen on three days
33. **Common Kestrel:** Seen on four days.
34. **Hobby:** Seen by Martin only in Tormes valley.
35. **Peregrine:** Seen in Monfragüe.
36. **Water Rail:** Seen at Arrocampo.
37. **Moorhen:** Seen on two days.
38. **Purple Swamphen:** Seen at Arrocampo.
39. **Black-winged Stilt:** Seen on the rice fields.
40. **Common Ringed Plover:** Seen on the rice fields.
41. **Little Ringed Plover:** Seen at Arrocampo and Alcollarín.
42. **Lapwing:** Seen on the rice fields.
43. **Gull-billed Tern:** Seen on Campo Lugar plains.
44. **Black-headed Gull:** Seen at Arrocampo.
45. **Black-bellied Sandgrouse:** Seen on Campo Lugar plains.

46. **Feral Pigeon**: Seen almost daily.
47. **Woodpigeon**: Seen daily.
48. **Collared Dove**: Seen almost daily.
49. **Turtle Dove**: Seen in Monfragüe.
50. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: Seen at Arrocampo.
51. **Common Cuckoo**: Recorded almost daily.
52. **Scops Owl**: Heard at Hostel Almansor.
53. **Alpine Swift**: Seen in Monfragüe and Mérida.
54. **Common Swift**: Seen daily.
55. **Pallid Swift**: Seen in Mérida.
56. **White-rumped Swift**: Seen in Monfragüe.
57. **Monk Parakeet**: Seen in Madrid.
58. **Kingfisher**: Seen on two days.
59. **Bee-eater**: Seen on five days.
60. **Roller**: Seen on Campo Lugar plains.
61. **Hoopoe**: Seen almost daily.
62. **Iberian Green Woodpecker**: Heard in the Tormes valley.
63. **Great Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen on three days.
64. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**: Seen in Mérida.
65. **Calandra Lark**: Common on the plains.
66. **Greater Short-toed Lark**: Seen on the plains.
67. **Crested Lark**: Seen on two days.
68. **Thekla Lark**: Seen on three days.
69. **Woodlark**: Seen on two days.
70. **Skylark**: Seen in the Gredos.
71. **Crag Martin**: Seen on three days.
72. **Barn Swallow**: Seen daily.
73. **Red-rumped Swallow**: Seen almost daily.
74. **House Martin**: Seen almost daily.
75. **Yellow Wagtail**: Seen on the rice fields and Gredos Mountains.
76. **Grey Wagtail**: Seen on two days.
77. **White Wagtail**: Seen almost daily.
78. **Wren**: Seen on three days.
79. **Robin**: Seen on four days.
80. **Nightingale**: Recorded almost every day.
81. **Bluethroat**: Seen on the Gredos.
82. **Black Redstart**: Seen almost daily.
83. **Stonechat**: Seen almost daily.
84. **Northern Wheatear**: Seen on the Gredos.
85. **Black-eared Wheatear**: Seen in Monfragüe.
86. **Black Wheatear**: Seen at Alange.
87. **Blue Rock Thrush**: Seen on two days.
88. **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**: Seen in the Gredos.
89. **Blackbird**: Seen daily.
90. **Mistle Thrush**: Seen in the Gredos.
91. **Cetti's Warbler**: Recorded on five days.
92. **Zitting Cisticola**: Seen on five days.
93. **Savi's Warbler**: Seen at Madrigalejo and at Arrocampo.

94. **Reed Warbler:** Recorded on three days.
95. **Great Reed Warbler:** Recorded on two days.
96. **Melodious Warbler:** Recorded on two days.
97. **Western Olivaceous Warbler:** Seen south of Mérida.
98. **Dartford Warbler:** Seen on two days.
99. **Subalpine Warbler:** Seen in Monfragüe.
100. **Sardinian Warbler:** Seen on two days.
101. **Western Orphean Warbler:** Heard in the Gredos.
102. **Common Whitethroat:** Seen in the Gredos.
103. **Blackcap:** Seen daily.
104. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** Seen in the Gredos.
105. **Common Chiffchaff:** Heard near Hostel Almansor.
106. **Firecrest:** Seen in Tormes valley.
107. **Goldcrest:** Seen in Tormes valley.
108. **Pied Flycatcher:** Seen in the Gredos.
109. **Long-tailed Tit:** Seen south of Mérida.
110. **Crested Tit:** Seen in the pines in Tormes valley.
111. **Coal Tit:** Seen in the pines in Tormes valley.
112. **Blue Tit:** Seen on three days.
113. **Great Tit:** Seen on two days.
114. **Short-toed Treecreeper:** Seen on two days.
115. **Golden Oriole:** Seen on three days.
116. **Iberian Grey Shrike:** Seen on three days.
117. **Woodchat Shrike:** Seen on two days.
118. **Red-backed Shrike:** Seen on three days.
119. **Jay:** Seen on two days.
120. **Iberian Magpie:** Seen almost daily.
121. **Magpie:** Seen daily.
122. **Jackdaw:** Seen on one day.
123. **Carrion Crow:** Seen in the Gredos.
124. **Raven:** Seen on three days.
125. **Spotless Starling:** Seen daily.
126. **House Sparrow:** Seen daily.
127. **Tree Sparrow:** Seen on two days.
128. **Rock Sparrow:** Heard on last day.
129. **Common Waxbill:** Seen on four days.
130. **Chaffinch:** Seen on four days.
131. **Serin:** Seen daily.
132. **Greenfinch:** Seen on three days.
133. **Citril Finch:** Seen briefly in the Tormes valley.
134. **Goldfinch:** Seen on three days.
135. **Linnet:** Seen on four days.
136. **Cirl Bunting:** Recorded on two days.
137. **Rock Bunting:** Seen in Monfragüe.
138. **Ortolan Bunting:** Seen in the Gredos.
139. **Corn Bunting:** Seen daily.

Mammals

- 1- Otter
- 2- Roe Deer
- 3- Red Deer
- 4- Spanish Ibex
- 5- Greater Horseshoe Bat

Butterflies

1. Swallowtail
2. Scarce Swallowtail
3. Small White
4. Bath White
5. Provence Orangetip
6. Clouded Yellow
7. Cleopatra
8. Brimstone
9. Spanish Purple Hairstreak
10. Sooty Copper
11. Small Copper
12. Holly Blue
13. Southern Brown Argus
14. Mountain Argus
15. Nettle-tree Butterfly
16. Two-tailed Pasha
17. Large Tortoiseshell
18. Small Tortoiseshell
19. Peacock
20. Painted Lady
21. Cardinal
22. Queen of Spain Fritillary
23. Knapweed Fritillary
24. Glanville Fritillary
25. Meadow Brown
26. Southern Gatekeeper
27. Speckled Wood
28. Wall Brown

Odonata

1. Broad-bodied Chaser
2. Red-veined Darter
3. Northern Banded Groundling

Herpetofauna

1. Iberian Water Frog
2. Bosca's Newt

3. Red-eared Terrapin
4. Three-toed Skink

Other Wildlife

Violet Carpenter Bee

Hummingbird Hawk Moth

Chimney Sweeper Moth