

Spain - Extremadura in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

11 – 17 November 2015



Cinereous & Griffon Vultures



Group in Serrejon looking Black winged kite



Blue Rock Thrush



Mantis in Madrigalejo

Report and photos by Laura Benito



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Tour Participants: Laura Benito and Simon Woolley (leaders) with 11 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Wednesday 11th November

London- Madrid-Trujillo

The flight from London to Madrid arrived at midday; Simon was on this flight with part of the group, but some of the participants were already in the airport because they flew with another company. Once we were all together, we sorted out the vehicles then started our journey to Trujillo leaving Madrid, using the motorway that surrounds the city, crossing Castilla la Mancha to Extremadura.

The weather was wonderful, making the journey more enjoyable, and we delighted in the extraordinary countryside landscape. We stopped in Oropesa for a comfort stop, where ice creams (in November!) and coffees were very welcome. We saw our first Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrike, perched on a wire.

Finally we arrived to the area of Trujillo at mid-afternoon, and our rural hotel Viña las Torres where hosts Belen and Juan Pedro were waiting ready to welcome us. After settling into our rooms, we enjoyed a welcome drink and delicious dinner.

Day 2

Thursday 12th November

Santa Marta de Magasca - Monroy

We started the morning enjoying a delicious breakfast in a quiet and relaxing atmosphere, with classical music playing in the background.

With the sun rising and a bright blue sky, we drove through Trujillo and headed to the first place to be explored: the plains of Santa Marta de Magasca, a typical landscape that mixes the *dehesa Mediterranea* with steppe habitat. A few stops along the access road produced several Common Buzzard, Southern Grey Shrike, Corn Bunting, Spanish Sparrows, Northern Lapwings, Meadow Pipit, and also Dartford Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, European Stonechat, and a group of Golden Plovers in the distance. We were lucky to have the opportunity to compare the difference between Crested Lark and Thekla Lark while they were sitting in a fence, quite close each other. While we were scanning the landscape, to our surprise, a Great Bustard appeared, flying in front of us.

We continued, driving just five minutes more until stopping again in a farm dirt track. From there we saw our first group of 10-20 Great Bustards, grazing in a field. We had good views of three Hoopoes and a group of Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpies fluttering around. We decided to walk along this track, making some stops to scan the area. We had great views of one Cinereous (Black) Vulture sitting in a rock, and a small group of Black-bellied Sandgrouse was seen and heard as they flew around us, against the blue sky. Then we spotted a group of Little Bustards flying and landing in a field. We tried to get closer to them, and had better views of these beautiful birds with the scope. After enjoying this, we continued our drive to the village of Santa Marta de Magasca and had a coffee break at the local bar.

We continued driving to the River Magasca where we stopped at the bridge. Sand Martins were flying above us. We were scanning for European Otters, but with no success this time. It was quiet, but good thermals were

forming and we spotted a large group of vultures flying, with good views of Griffon and Cinereous vultures flying together. A group of four Terrapins were lying on the shore, taking a sunbath. And we heard the call of the Kingfisher who was crossing the river very fast, as it always does. Some of the participants saw the Golden Eagle soaring on the horizon while Simon and I were picking up the vans. We drove back to Santa Marta de Magasca where enjoyed our lunch, with also good views of a Golden Eagle, vultures, Greenfinches and Goldfinches which livened up our picnic.

After lunch we continued our excursion driving along the road of Monroy. From the road we scanned the plains: fields where the cattle graze, with low vegetation and water holes: perfect habitat for Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. A group of Black-bellied flew in front of us before landing just ahead; we tried to get closer and enjoyed this lovely bird just for seconds before they started to fly again. But the surprise of the day was to find a couple of Imperial Eagles perched at the top of one tree, quite close to us! How wonderful it was to see one of the magnificent and scarce European eagles, and a good way to end a very exciting day!

Then we made our way back to Viña las Torres, to have a break and enjoy our delicious local dinner.

Day 3

Friday 13th November

Monfragüe National Park

Our day started a little bit earlier than usual. After a nice breakfast, we set out to drive north towards Monfragüe National Park; the sun rose to hit the hills and the town of Trujillo, promising another beautiful day!

We drove through picturesque countryside, enjoying the landscape of the *dehesas*. A nice Imperial Eagle sitting on a pylon made us stop along the main road. We had fantastic views of this exemplar, a good way to start! We continued driving to Monfragüe National Park. Our first stop was in the Castle of Monfragüe, where we enjoyed nice views of the park and a large number of Griffon and Cinereous Vultures flying at the eye-level. A Peregrine Falcon delighted us with his acrobatic flight.

Next stop was at the Point of Peña Falcon or Salto del Gitano. Great and Blue Tits, Meadow Pipits, Black Redstarts and Crag Martins were quite active, fluttering around us. A big group of Griffons Vultures, a pair of Cinereous Vultures and one Peregrine Falcon were actively flying above or just sitting on the rocks. Finally, a Blue Rock Thrush appeared at the top of one rock not far from us. We had great views and good picture opportunities.

We started to move on, to the village of Villareal de San Carlos, in the heart of Monfragüe National Park where we had a coffee for energy recovery. After that, we had a short walk round the village which produced nice views of another Blue Rock Thrush, Linnets, Chaffinch, Goldfinches and good views of a shy Hawfinch perched in a tree. It was already lunchtime, so we decided to go to our picnic site: La Tajadilla

After lunch, we went for a walk in a small pine forest, in search for European Treecreeper and Crested Tit which we finally saw! Then we headed towards our next stop "La Portilla del Tietar". We scanned this interesting area, where lots of Griffon Vultures were occupying the rocky crags. Other birds like Blue Rock Thrush, Great Cormorant and European Kingfisher were spotted here.

Finally, we started our drive back to Viña las Torres for a well-deserved break before enjoying the dinner.

Day 4

Saturday 14th November

Campo Lugar - Sierra Brava - Alcollarín

Today we drove south, through the village of Zorita. Our first place to explore was the plains of Campo Lugar, driving along a farm road, while we were scanning the fields on both sides. We had nice views of a lovely Little Owl perched on a pile of rocks. In the fields nearby were a lot of Crested Larks, Meadow Pipits, Corn Bunting and Lapwings, and we enjoyed good views of a Calandra Lark sitting in a rock. A female and male Marsh Harrier were soaring over the fields.

Some Great Bustards were spotted in the distance. We stopped in order to have better views of them with the scope, then we realised that it was a big group! Minutes later, from the vehicle, we saw a group of Little Bustards landing in a field not far from where we were, but not visible because they were behind the hill.

We continued down the road towards Madrijalejo to check the rice fields where the Common Cranes spend the major part of the winter. The first groups of these elegant birds were spotted from the van in these fields. Walking around the old rail, we saw a group of three Stone-curlew, well camouflaged in the sand, they stayed there for a few minutes before they flew away from us. A big flock of Common Cranes was seen in the distance, but once we started to walk towards them they flew. Around this site we saw several Zitting Cisticola, Spanish Sparrow, Tree Sparrow and big flocks of the noisy Waxbill.

We moved to the other side of the main road and took the road that goes to the reservoir, through *debesas*, rice fields and past a solar farm. Huge flocks of Common Cranes were feeding in these rice fields, together with some Great Egrets, Little Egrets and Cattle Egret. We continued driving along the reservoir until we reached the place for our picnic lunch. From there, scanning the reservoir we saw Egyptian Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Pintail and Great crested Grebe.

After lunch we drove to another reservoir called Alcollarín where we saw a nice group of Spoonbills resting in the shore, and both White Storks and Black Storks!! The three species of egrets: Great, Little and Cattle were sitting together on a small dam, giving us the opportunity to compare sizes and the differences between them.

After a pleasant walk we started to return to the hotel. It was a good end to a productive day. In our hotel after a break, we did the daily checklist and enjoyed another nice dinner.

Day 5

Sunday 15th November

Saucedilla, Arrocampo - Serrejón - Portilla del Tietar

We had breakfast at the usual time. Once everybody was ready and in the vans, we started heading north through Trujillo on the motorway, taking the exit 21, and took the former track to Saucedilla. From the van, Jenna saw a nice Black-shouldered Kite perched on a tree; when we stopped to have better views of this wonderful raptor, we realised that there were three! We had magnificent views of them, one quite close, sitting on a pylon eating his prey. We continued to the town of Saucedilla to have a coffee and then to visit the marshes of Arrocampo where

we had lovely views of Purple Swamphen, Zitting Cisticola, Marsh Harrier, Penduline Tit and Bearded Tit. We continued our walk round the wooden hides looking for Bluethroat, but with no success.

It was time for lunch, and we prepared the picnic on the tables near the visitor centre. It was a sunny day, and we were very happy to enjoy our lunch sitting in the sun in the middle of November!

After lunch we continued driving south, towards Monfragüe National Park. We made a stop along the way, leaving the main road to enter into a *dehesa* for a birding stroll. It was so quiet but we saw Blue Tit, Great Tit, Nuthatch and Woodlark. We continued our drive making the next stop in “La Portilla del Tietar”, a place we had visited two days before. The aim of this stop was to be there until dusk to have the opportunity to see the Eagle-Owl. We were unlucky this time, but the experience of being there until dark, in silence, just listening to the birds was incredible!

We then returned to our hotel, where Belen and Pedro were waiting for us with another delicious dinner and local wine.

Day 6

Monday 16th November

Montánchez - Merida City - Trujillo

The orange horizon promised another sunny day. After breakfast we drove south-west towards the village of Montánchez, in order to explore the castle, a very interesting place for some birds during winter.

It is the highest town in Extremadura, 800m above the sea level, with a strategically important position. The castle is at the very top. We took a walk around the ruins, a lot of Crag Martins were flying above us, but the surprise was to see House Martins mixed with them! We also saw Greenfinch, Black Redstart, Goldfinch and Blue Rock Thrush. We put our efforts in to finding Alpine Accentors, and finally we saw two of these beautiful birds, but they were very active: they didn't stop anywhere for more than two seconds! After that, we headed down to the main square for a coffee.

We drove to Merida, big city placed in the north of the Badajoz province. The roman bridge over the river Guadiana, has been a very good spot for Little Bittern in the past, and we were very successful last year. But to our surprise when we arrived there, we found the river covered by Water Hyacinth (*Eichhorma crassipes*), an invasive plant from South America that has colonized the river Guadiana, changing the habitat and, of course, the biodiversity. We checked a few spots from the bridge with no success. We then decided to have lunch in a nice picnic area, next to the river.

After lunch we drove back to Trujillo, where we stopped for a couple of hours to visit the town and enjoy the nice historic buildings and a coffee in the main square. In the early evening, we all gathered together and enjoyed our last dinner.

Day 7

Tuesday 17th November

Trujillo - Madrid Barajas - London

After a very early breakfast we said goodbye and thank you very much to Belen and Pedro, who had looked after us and prepared delicious meals all week in their wonderful hotel.

We drove towards Madrid-Barajas airport, stopping very briefly on the way for coffee and to use the facilities before continuing. We arrived at Madrid airport in time to catch the flight. It was time to say goodbye and to wish our very best to each other.

We had a very good time together in the beautiful and still unknown Extremadura!

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Picnic in Arrocampo

Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>				✓		
2	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>				✓		
3	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				✓		
4	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>				✓		
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				✓		
7	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				✓		
8	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				✓		
9	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
10	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓		✓	✓	
11	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓		
12	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>				✓		
13	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓
14	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				✓		
15	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				✓	✓	✓
16	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓		
18	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
20	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>						
21	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>					✓	
22	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
24	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓	✓			
25	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓				
26	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓			✓	
27	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
28	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>					✓	
29	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				✓		
32	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>				✓	✓	
33	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>					✓	
34	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				✓	✓	✓
35	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓	✓	✓
36	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
37	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>				✓		
38	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓		
39	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓				
41	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					✓	
42	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓		✓	✓
44	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	
45	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>						
46	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓		✓
47	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		✓				

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			11	12	13	14	15	16
48	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓			
49	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓		✓		
52	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓			
55	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		✓				
57	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓			
58	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓		✓	
60	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓				✓
63	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>			✓			
64	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			✓			
66	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓		✓	✓
67	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓
68	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>					✓	
69	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			✓		✓	
70	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓		✓		
71	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓		✓		
72	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓		✓		
74	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>						✓
76	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H		H	H	H
77	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>						✓
78	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
79	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		✓		✓	✓	
80	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
82	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓		✓	
84	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>					H	
85	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓			
86	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓	✓		
87	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓
89	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>						
90	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
91	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓		✓	
92	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>						
94	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			✓			✓
96	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			11	12	13	14	15	16
99	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>				✓		
100	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>				✓		✓
101	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>				✓		
102	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>						✓
103	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			✓			
104	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
105	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
107	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>				✓		
108	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
109	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			✓			
110	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓				
111	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓				✓
112	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
113	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓
114	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓	✓			✓
115	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓		✓		
116	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>					✓	

Other Taxa

Red Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*

Iberian Hare, *Lepus granatensis*

Red Deer, *Cervus elaphus*

Iberian Mole, *Talpa iberica*

Green-striped White, *Euchloe belemia*

Clouded Yellow, *Colias crocea*

Small Heath, *Coenonympha pamphilus*

W European Scorpion, *Buthus occitanus*

Badger, *Meles meles*

Rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

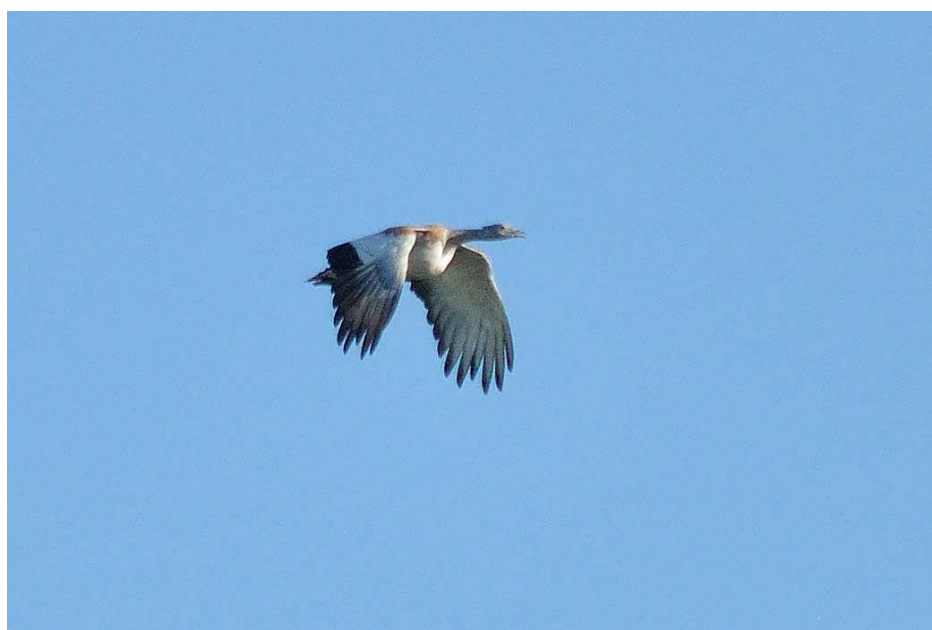
Wild Boar, *Sus scrofa*

Stripeless Tree Frog, *Hyla meridionalis*

Small White, *Pieris rapae*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

Grass Processionary Moth, *Thaumetopoea herculeana*



Flying Great Bustard