

# Spain - Extremadura in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

5 - 11 February 2013

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Cinereous Vulture



Common Cranes



European Otter



Pin-tailed Sandgrouse

Report and images compiled by Byron Palacios



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## Summary

Great wintering and resident birdlife is always a delight to see around the dehesas, plains and steppes, and the craggy mountains of Extremadura. Once again, this has proved to be one of Naturetrek's most popular winter destinations for good reason, where wildfowl, cranes, passerines and waders gather away from the harsh northern winters, offering to us great birding entertainment alongside wonderful landscapes and superb food!

### Day 1

**Tuesday 5th February**

#### Flight London to Madrid and road journey to Trujillo

Half of the group arrived in Madrid after midday, and then, we picked our second half of the group up who arrived at 13:20. We loaded up our van and started our trip down to Trujillo in the heart of Extremadura. The motorway and roads were fairly clear making our driving smooth, whilst the sunny afternoon made the journey even more enjoyable as we overlooked the wonderful countryside landscapes on the slopes of the Gredos mountains. We had a comfort stop on the way, where we also picked some birds such as Black Redstart, Red Kite, Meadow Pipit, Song Thrush and Crested Lark. Soon, we continued our journey, arriving in the area of Trujillo in the late afternoon and straight to Viña Las Torres where our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen welcomed us to their lovely finca, followed by drinks and a delicious dinner.

### Day 2

**Wednesday 6th February**

#### Santa Martha de Magasca (Monroy road) & Belen plains

We started today having a tasty breakfast, enjoying the surroundings of Vina Las Torres. The morning looked a bit grey and overcast, though the sun broke through once we gathered together at the car park, ready to start our day! The temperature reminded us we were still in winter, but with the sun rising ahead, we drove up towards Santa Marta de Magasca, making a quick stop in Trujillo in order to pick up some fresh bread and local meat for our picnic lunch. We continued our driving down to the River Magasca's lower basin, where the dehesas and steppes brought us very interesting birds. Our first stop produced Corn Buntings, Stonechat, Spanish Sparrow, Crested Lark, Lapwing, Skylark, Raven, Red Kite, European Golden Plover, and Southern Grey Shrike, amongst others. A small group of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse was heard constantly calling around, but we really struggled to locate them.

Soon we travelled along a local farm track amongst the local ‘retinto’ cattle, and stopped on the highest point which allowed us plenty of visibility and views the steppe area, bringing excellent views of a small group of Black-bellied Sandgrouse in flight. The morning also offered a great stage for raptors to soar around; a few Red Kites were soaring above a cork oak area visible in the distance, together with two Cinereous Vultures and one Griffon Vulture. A single female Great Bustard flew across the road, right in front of us, landing in the middle distance field, from where we looked through our scopes, finding three more in the same area.

We continued another two kilometres along the road to the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, where a coffee break was very well welcome to warm us up, and continued along the road down to the River Almonte de Magasca where we planned to explore the area a bit and set up our picnic lunch. While we worked on this, the group went for a meander around the tracks seeing Black Vultures and Red Kite. Soon after we lunched, the temperature suddenly went up to 11°C with bright sun. We then went back on track and drove on the narrow farm road from Monroy to Trujillo which took us southwards into the high plains. Here we took a nice walk along the track which leads to a sheep and cattle farm. A lot of Calandra Larks, Corn Buntings, Stonechats, Linnets, Meadow Pipits and Lapwings crowded the meadows and fields alongside.

We left this lush area and drove a good twenty minutes towards Trujillo and went to an area known as Belen Plains. Apart from the usual winter birds – Northern Lapwing, Golden Plover, Calandra Larks, Corn Buntings and Red Kites – we managed to find a group of approximately twelve Little Bustards in one of the distant fields. A mysterious Little Grebe was also seen, and a Little Owl sat on top of one of the old farm houses, plus Hoopoe, Sparrowhawk and Green Sandpiper. We made our way back to Vina Las Torres to enjoy a drink while waiting for our tasty dinner!

## Day 3

Thursday 7th February

### Monfragüe National Park

After an early breakfast, we hit the road heading north, driving on a beautiful sunny morning and admiring the unique landscape of the region. A quick stop along the main road to see a group of hungry and funny Iberian pigs, (famous worldwide for producing that lovely Iberian Ham or Pork Loin)! We were also amused by groups of Common Cranes roosting amongst the ‘dehesa’ (holm and cork oaks and meadows). The journey to our first stop within Monfragüe National Park took around forty-five minutes to our first stop known as Peña Falcon. Dozens of Griffon Vultures were flying at eye-level whilst others were sat on the Peña Falcon rocky cliffs. While Griffons were soaring and landing around the highest pinnacle, two Peregrine Falcons joined the action around the busy cliffs, flying as fast as usual and also alongside a group of vultures soaring around. Two Black Vultures joined the flying birds at times, while one of the Peregrines was giving us a great show of speed and flight diving.

In spite of the bright sun, the chilly late morning suggested a quick break over a hot drink in the tiny village of Villareal de San Carlos, but we first made a stop in the bridge over the River Tajo where a few Rock Buntings were seen well; then we were off for a nice coffee before continuing to our next stop at the hydroelectric power station. Here we had a check around for a few interesting birds such as dozens of Azure-winged Magpies, Black Vultures flying in the blue sky, House Martins, Barn Swallow, Crag Martin, Grey Heron and Great Cormorant.

After that, we continued our drive along the Tietar Dam, where we stopped to enjoy the landscape and the prominent cliffs (Portilla del Tietar cliffs) occupied by more Griffon Vultures. It was a bit quiet when we arrived, and we decided to keep checking this nice spot by having our lunch right there, which we enjoyed a lot! We continued further north in order to take a good walk around a nice old cork oak dehesa habitat. We watched some Mistle and Song Thrushes, Sardinian Warbler, Short-toed Treecreeper, Red Kite, Common Buzzard and Eurasian Nuthatch around. We then started our drive back to Trujillo, making a quick stop at Peña Falcon, which produced a nice sighting of a lovely Blue Rock Thrush which we missed during our first stop earlier that morning. We continued our journey back to Viña Las Torres for a well deserved break and to enjoy our local drinks and dinner.

## Day 4

Friday 8th February

### Zorita – Campo Lugar – Sierra Brava Reservoir

Another beautiful morning, although chilly - the sun was rising and hitting the rolling hills and steppes... We drove up out of Viña Las Torres aiming to head south through the village of Zorita, turning southwest to reach to the plains of Campo Lugar. Lots of birds were seen along the farm road, such as Northern Lapwing, European Golden Plover, Corn Bunting, Crested and Calandra Larks, Skylark, amongst others. We found two Cinereous Vultures standing in one of the fields. We had great views of both of them before they got fed up of our presence and flew away.

We decided to continue our drive down to the rice fields. We took a good walk along the main track and found great birds such as Common Cranes, Redwing, Jacksnipe, Marsh Harrier, Common Waxbill, Fan-tailed Warbler, Corn Bunting, Dartford Warbler, and a beautiful male of Hen Harrier. We also saw some other Common Snipes flying by, Grey and White Wagtails, Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Buzzard, Common Chiffchaff, Great White Egret, Southern Grey Shrike, Little and Cattle Egrets too.

After our walk through the rice fields, we drove up to our picnic spot just by one of the shores of the Sierra Brava dam. We enjoyed our lunch while watching thousands of waterfowl in the distance, so we drove closer to them after lunch just to find out that there were thousands of Shoveler there, together with some European Teal, Great Crested Grebe, Shelduck and Mallards. We then drove back to the plains along the farm road of Campo Lugar, this time to find a group of over a dozen Great Bustards, followed by a single Griffon and Cinereous Vultures that we found in one of the fields by the road!

After this, we continued towards the Sierra Brava reservoir and walked through the main dehesa and towards one of the shores of the dam. We found interesting birds on our walk such as Sardinia Warbler, Song Thrush, Common Crane, White Stork, Short-toed Treecreeper, Common Chiffchaff and a beautiful Firecrest. A few Iberian Hares were also seen fairly well running around the dehesa.

We returned to our hotel in order to get ready for dinner, and of course some drinks and nibbles beforehand. We also went to Trujillo right after dinner in search for an urban Eagle Owl which has been reported in the last few days and seen around the roofs of the town's buildings. We had fun looking for it but we could not find it in the end.

## Day 5

Saturday 9th February

### Montanchez – Santa Marta de Magasca (through Cáceres)

It was a beautiful morning around Viña Las Torres, and we were all fresh and ready to enjoy our morning breakfast! We departed the hotel afterwards with a clear blue sky again and headed southwest, through Trujillo, to the old village of Montanchez, situated at 750 metres above the sea level and one of the main producers of fantastic Iberian Ham or ‘jamón ibérico’. We arrived at the top of the village where the castle lies on top of a massive rock formation. Although there is evidence of prehistoric settlement, the first major residents here were the Romans, who founded the town in the 1st Century AD which continued through time to form an important defensive line because of its strategically positioned location. We found very interesting birds by the castle, such as Alpine Accentor, Serin, Rock Bunting, Blue Rock Thrush, Crag Martins, and Linnet, amongst others. We then walked a bit lower and in to a small dehesa next to the cemetery in search of Eagle Owl but we weren’t lucky this time. So we walked down to the village’s main square in order to enjoy a hot drink in one of the traditional cafes.

Then we continued heading north to the plains, going through Cáceres, and crossed along the rugged hills until we found a suitable place to have lunch by the River Almonte. A very exciting sighting was made here when we found a pair of Bonelli’s Eagles very close to us and soaring right above our heads for a while! It was amazing, such a great view of this very scarce raptor!! But that was just a warm up as we were determined to find other nice birds we had not seen yet; so we drove back to the plains around Santa Marta de Magasca and stopped by a great steppe habitat. Scanning intensively, we managed to find a group of over a dozen Pin-tailed Sandgrouse; even better, we could cross the gate into the field and walked even closer to the group, pushing our luck and keeping the sandgrouse still in the ground and amongst the helpful flock of sheep. Some of them flew away but at least three pairs remained giving us great close views of this lovely bird! Not just content with this, we carried on and this time we went after Black-bellied Sandgrouse. We found three pairs of this lovely bird too, and we tried to get closer to them – after getting great views through the scopes – but this time they were more spooky than the others so they flew away. We got wonderful views of them in flight as they circled around us!

After this, we drove to Belén Plains in order to get better views of Little Bustards but we didn’t find any, just more Calandra and Crested Larks, Northern Lapwing, Stonechat, White Storks on nest and lovely views of the very handsome European Hoopoe! We then decided to go and check a bit of Trujillo before returning back to our hotel, where we enjoyed another magnificent dinner and completed the day’s species log.

## Day 6

Sunday 10th February

### Saucedilla (Arrocampo) Dam, Monfragüe National Park

We had breakfast at the usual time and set off heading north through Trujillo about forty minutes on the motorway towards the Saucedilla (Arrocampo) Dam. It was chilly once we arrived to the marshes, yet we had great light and were able to see Purple Gallinule in flight, plus Marsh Harrier, Moorhen, Common Chiffchaff, and Grey Heron, amongst others. We moved to the second hide where two more Purple Swamphens were wandering amongst the reed hedges, while Cetti’s Warblers were calling from everywhere. Then we heard an active Penduline Tit which replied to our tape giving us great quick views through the scope, although not for long.

We saw a few European Kingfisher flying in front of us many times, and a Eurasian (Great) Bittern also flew from one of the reed beds in front of us. We also saw some Sand Martins around, while Purple Gallinules were more cooperative than other birds. As the morning was passing by, we continued our drive in search of Black-winged Kite, which was not a problem as we found one hovering just as we left Saucedilla, wonderful views we got of this lovely raptor! After that, we decided to stop for a coffee break in one of the cafes by the main road, which in the end turned in to an early lunch as the bank holiday kept a lot of shops shut so we decided to grab a delicious pork loin sandwich at the cafe, as well as a Spanish omelette.

We started our way back making a loop through the Placencia motorway until we entered the beautiful Monfragüe National Park, where we found another Black-winged Kite by the road which we enjoyed watching again!! Lots of Barn Swallows, House and Crag Martins, together with Song and Mistle Thrushes, Griffon and Black Vultures and Red Kite were spotted during our drive. We made a stop at the point known as Portilla del Tietar where we saw more vultures, but even better than that, we enjoyed watching a beautiful European Otter swimming and fishing around right in front of us, wonderful!!

The weather was still overcast and cold, so we decided to drive to Villareal de San Carlos where a nice cafe serves good coffee and sandwiches too. We had our coffee break here and we were determined to get a Spanish Imperial Eagle which had been very elusive for us. We drove back to Portilla del Tietar where we tried a lot and looked hard for this endemic eagle. Suddenly, a female Spanish Imperial Eagle emerged amongst the group of Griffon Vultures and most of us had quick but good views of this nice bird! Then, she disappeared and never came back. We decided to drive back to our place in order to start our preparation for our trip to Madrid the following morning. And also, of course, to enjoy the usual drinks and last dinner together!

## Day 7

Monday 11th February

Trujillo – Madrid Barajas Airport. Travel back to the UK

After a delicious breakfast, we sorted out our luggage and belongings and hit the road towards Madrid-Barajas airport, after saying MUCHAS GRACIAS to Belen and Juan Pedro for looking after us throughout the week. A few birds were spotted by some of us while driving; a pair of Eurasian Jays, Eurasian Magpie, Common Kestrel, Red Kite, White Storks, Common Cranes, Iberian Magpie, amongst others, were seen en route.

We arrived at Madrid-Barajas airport in time to catch our flight, and for others the train to Seville... We said our goodbyes and wished our very best to each other, bearing in mind the wonderful time we had together 'wintering' for seven days in the vast and beautiful Extremadura!

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## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	February						
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓			✓		✓	
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓			
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				✓	✓		
6	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				✓			
7	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓		✓	h	
8	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓			
9	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>						✓	
11	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓			✓	✓		
12	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓
13	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓			
14	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓
16	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>						✓	
17	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓		✓	
21	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				✓			
22	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓				
23	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
24	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>						✓	
25	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>					✓		
26	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓				
28	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		✓		✓			
29	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>		✓					
30	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				h		h	
31	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>						✓	
32	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓				✓	
33	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>						✓	
34	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
35	Eurasian Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>				✓			
36	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
37	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓		✓	✓		
38	Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyptes minimus</i>				✓			
39	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				✓		✓	
40	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓		✓			
41	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓
42	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
43	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓			
44	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>					✓		
45	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		✓			✓		
46	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	February						
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11
48	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓			✓		
50	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>						✓	
51	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
52	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓
54	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓				✓	✓
58	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
59	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
60	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
61	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>						✓	
62	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓		✓	✓		
63	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓		✓	✓		
65	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
67	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓
68	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>						✓	
69	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				h		✓	
70	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓			✓	
71	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				✓			
73	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓		✓		
74	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				✓			
75	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		✓	✓	✓			
76	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>				✓			
77	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓		✓		
78	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓	h			
79	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓	✓			
80	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>				✓			
81	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>				✓			
84	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	
85	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
86	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
87	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
88	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
89	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>					✓		
90	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			✓		✓	✓	
91	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓		✓	✓		
93	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>				✓			
94	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>					✓		
95	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>					✓		
96	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓	✓		✓	
97	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	February						
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11
99	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
100	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
101	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓	✓	✓	
102	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
103	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		✓			✓		
104	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
105	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
106	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			✓		✓		
107	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>			✓				

### Butterflies

1	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>		✓					
2	Wallbrown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>		✓					
3	Peacock Butterfly	<i>Inachis io</i>			✓				

### Mammals

1	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>			✓	✓			
2	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			✓			✓	
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓		✓	✓	
4	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>					✓		
5	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>						✓	

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