

# Spain - Extremadura in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 – 28 December 2013

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Spanish Imperial Eagle



Black Vulture



Common Cranes



Purple Swamphen

Report & images compiled by David and Kate Morris



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## Day 1

Sunday 22nd December

Mild and sunny with some cloud

Having boarded our late morning flight from London, we arrived in a mild and sunny Madrid where we picked up our mini buses and drove west towards Portugal. We made our way through the expansive Spanish agricultural landscape before entering the rolling dehesa of Extremadura as the light quickly dwindled by late afternoon. En-route we observed large flocks of Spotless Starlings and three Eagle Owls perched on roadside pylons near Oropesa. By early evening we arrived at our comfortable rural hotel to enjoy a traditional meal, wine and a roaring log fire.

## Day 2

Monday 23rd December

Mild and sunny with some cloud

A positive weather forecast and a bright, sunny morning greeted us on our first full day in Extremadura, so after breakfast we headed north en-route to Monfrague National Park. The journey took us through rolling dehesa that was full of Azure-Winged Magpies, Southern Grey Shrike and Common Cranes, which were feeding under the Holm Oaks. A stop at the Rio Almonte added Dartford Warbler and Crested Lark, amongst other common birds of the dehesa. We headed further north towards the national park and the Peñafalcón where we witnessed the amazing spectacle of Griffon Vultures and Black Vultures soaring above us. We also found Short-toed Tree Creeper, Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting at this site.

After a brief pause to use the facilities at the National Park Centre in Villareal de San Carlos, we enjoyed a picnic lunch joined by Azure-winged Magpies next to the Rio Tietar. After lunch we stopped at the Portilla del Tietar to look for raptors.

By this point the cloud had started closing in and we were unlucky with raptors, but highlights included getting close views of Griffon Vultures collecting nesting materials from the trees behind us and a prolonged view of an otter hunting and catching fish in the river below.

To finish the day we headed to the Castillo de Monfrague for panoramic views of the national park and the rolling plains beyond. We were also rewarded with views of soaring vultures below the castle. Our first days birding over, we returned to our charming hotel to enjoy another of Belen's home cooked meals and excellent red wine.

## Day 3

**Tuesday 24th December**

Windy and wet

We woke up to heavy skies and the threat of rain, but headed out to the wetlands at Saucedilla in the hope of sheltering in the hides. The day got off to a good start as we saw a Black-winged Kite and Marsh Harrier, but unfortunately we arrived to find that the hides and visitor's centre were closed. Regardless, we headed out onto the reserve and soon spotted a Purple Swamp Hen and Squacco Heron before the Heavens opened, causing us to make a hasty retreat back to the vehicles. We decided to warm up with a coffee in a cosy, local café in Almaraz with views of White Storks on the church. With no change in the weather we headed back towards the hotel, taking a detour across the steppe on Belen Plain. As we turned off onto the plain we discovered a huge grounded Black Vulture and a number of Ravens by the roadside. Out on the plain we also noted Southern Grey Shrike, Crested and Calandra Larks, plus hundreds of wintering Lapwings.

We ate our lunch in the sheltered courtyard of the hotel, after which some of the group elected to stay, whilst the rest of us went out to further explore the steppe around the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. On the open and windswept plains, we had good views of both Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, as well as winter flocks of larks, pipits, wagtails, sparrows and buntings. In the evening we headed into Trujillo for our Christmas Eve meal at a local restaurant and observed large numbers of night-time roosting White Wagtails and Spotless Starlings in the town centre.

## Day 4

**Wednesday 25th December**

Cool, rain, with occasional clear spells

After breakfast we headed south towards the fertile plains of Zorita, calling en-route at a patch of steppe near Campo Lugar. Outside of the village of Campo Lugar we enjoyed a break in the rain and observed Spanish Sparrows, Serin, Hoopoe and Sardinian Warbler. Out on the steppe the strong wind and rain kept most birds down, but we did find a group of about 40 Little Bustards and 22 Great Bustards. Around mid-morning we drove on to the nearby dam at the Embalse de Sierra Brava that gave us views over the large expanse of water. As we passed we saw large numbers of Gadwall and Coot.

We moved on towards the fertile rice and maze fields below the dam that were occupied by large flocks of feeding cranes and Greylag Geese, along with Cattle Egrets, White Stork and Lapwing. A search of the paddy fields discovered Ruff, Black-winged Stilt and Snipe, along with a juvenile Bluethroat feeding in the ditches. With the rain persisting and the promise of hot drinks, we headed back to the hotel for lunch.

Some members of the group decided to stay there for the afternoon whilst the rest of us tried our luck on the steppe near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. We came across Red Kites, Hen Harrier, and further groups of Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. In the evening we headed back into Trujillo for an enjoyable Christmas Day meal at a traditional restaurant.

## Day 5

Thursday 26th December

Mild with sunny spells

After picking up some supplies in Trujillo, we headed to the steppe to the north of the town around the village of Santa Marta de Magasca. We were able to study the winter flocks of larks and found both Thekla and Wood Lark, amongst the more regular species. After a brief pause for coffee in Santa Marta de Magasca we continued out into the steppe, finding a pair of Golden Eagles and Golden Plover within the Lapwing flocks. A pause by the roadside to investigate a group of vultures on the ground rewarded us with excellent views of both Black and Griffon Vultures as they took to the sky, before noticing the characteristic ginger plumage of a juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle circling above us.

Lunch was enjoyed at the Rio Tozo before we made our way south towards the extensive rice and maize fields around Madrigalejo and Vegas Altas. We spent the rest of the afternoon studying thousands of wintering cranes before they flew into their evening roosts as the sunset. Other birds we found included Hen and Marsh Harrier, Common Waxbill and vast flocks of Spanish Sparrows. With darkness drawing in we headed north back towards the hotel, stopping briefly to observe an impressive and raucous egret roost by the roadside. We finished the evening off with one of Belen's delicious home-cooked meals, complete with wine from the local region.

## Day 6

Friday 27th December

Mild and cloudy with a strong breeze, some rain in the late afternoon

On our final full day in Extremadura we decided to explore the rich wetlands around Saucedilla and the Embalse de Arrocampo in the morning and re-visit Monfrague in the afternoon. A cloudy, but thankfully dry start greeted us first thing at the hotel. We headed east towards the wetlands where one of the first birds we saw was a Purple Swamp Hen. An exploration of the wetland habitat enabled us to find Marsh Harrier, Cetti's Warbler, Little Bittern and Great White Egret. Before leaving Saucedilla we warmed up with a coffee in a local café, before finding a Black-winged Kite near the village of Casatejada en route to Monfrague National Park.

We travelled through extensive areas of mature cork oak dehesa and farmland, observing Common Cranes and Red Deer. We arrived at the Portilla del Tietar to be greeted by circling Griffon Vultures and both adult and juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle. We enjoyed our picnic lunch by the river with the stunning adult Imperial Eagle watched over us for the entirety of our lunch break from his perch on the opposite side of the river. The proximity and duration of our encounter with this bird allowed us to fully appreciate the key identification features of the species. After going back through the national park we called at the supermarket in Trujillo to allow people to purchase local wine, meat and cheeses to take home and enjoy.

## Day 7

Saturday 28th December

### Mild and Sunny

On our final morning we enjoyed our last breakfast before loading the vans and saying our goodbyes to our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen. We arrived at Madrid airport in plenty of time before getting our British Airways flight back to the UK where we all said farewell at arrivals before continuing our journeys back home.

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## Species List

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

	Common name	Scientific name	December							
			22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>							1	
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			2				4	
3	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		40+				10	400+	
4	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			1					
5	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>							3	
6	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>			200+	100+	1000+	100+	40+	
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			1	20	200+	20		
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		15	4	10	20	20	2	
9	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	3		1	10	30+	20	8	
10	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				5k+				
11	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		2	15	500+				
12	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				600+				
13	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>				200				
14	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>				25				
15	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>							8	
16	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			1				1	
17	Black Kite	<i>Milvis migrans</i>	2							
18	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	5		4	15	20+	20+	15	
19	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		1k+		1	40+	200+	4	
20	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		8	2		8	4		
21	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>				3	2	1		
22	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				3	4	6		
23	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	3	6	2		6	4	8	
24	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>					1	2		
25	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>					2			
26	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	6	3	2	10	10	10	8	
27	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1						
28	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				22				
29	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>				40+	8			
30	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		6			30+			
31	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>			1				4	
32	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>							2	
33	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			40				50+	
34	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	20	250	25	6k	10k	400	40	
35	Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				1				
36	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	150	✓	✓	✓	✓	150+	
37	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>				10	200			
38	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		2		6	2	3		
39	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			1	4	4			
40	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		1					2	
41	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>				1				
42	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>				400+	500+	20	30	
43	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		1		6	3	10		
44	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>					10	20		
45	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>			50+	40+				
46	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>			15	20+				
47	Feral/Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			22	23	24	25	26	27	28
48	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	3						
51	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>							
52	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>							
53	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		6	3	6	15	10	5
54	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	2	10	8	20	30	20	6
55	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		15	20	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		8				2	
57	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	8	100+	20	50	50	30	10
59	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			15	6	10		
60	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>			2				
61	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		10	6	4	2	2	
62	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		10	4	2	4	4	
63	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			30	40	40		
64	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		10	15	50	200	50	10
65	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>					4		
66	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					4		
67	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			1	20	30	10	
68	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>		1			10	40+	
69	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				H	H	6H	
70	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		H					
71	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		6	2	20	40	10	
72	Fan-tailed Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				1	4		
73	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		15	2	5	10	6	
74	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		2			1		
75	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		12			4		
76	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		2					
77	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		3			H		
78	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
79	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		20	20	✓	✓	✓	
80	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		30	10	15	4	2	5
81	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		1		1	2	1	
82	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
83	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>				1			
84	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>	1	20	4	20	20	6	
85	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>		10	20	15	✓	20	10
86	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		6				1	
87	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			30	60	300+	100+	
89	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	2			1	20		
90	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>					20+		
91	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		2		1		1	
92	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		15	140	✓	✓	✓	
93	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		25+	✓	✓	✓	✓	
94	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
95	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>					1		
96	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		10	H	20+			
97	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>				1	3	10	
98	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			22	23	24	25	26	27	28
99	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>			40	✓		6	
100	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		6				4	
101	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	20+	40	✓	✓	✓	✓	30+
102	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>		2					
103	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		1					

## Mammals

Otter

Rabbit

Iberian Hare

Red Deer

## Herptiles

Natterjack Toad