

# Spain – Extremadura at Christmas

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 - 28 December 2015



Griffon Vulture by Andrew Bray



Dartford Warbler by Alan Woodward



Spanish Imperial Eagle by Alan Woodward



On top of Pico Villuercas by Andrew Bray

Report compiled by Andrew Bray  
Images courtesy of Alan Woodward and Andrew Bray



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Tour participants: John Muddeman and Andrew Bray (leaders) with 12 Naturetrek clients

## Summary

The trip encountered fog on three days, though this certainly did not stop us from seeing a remarkable variety of specialities of the area, many of which are not seen in UK. Having five full days gave us the flexibility to amend the daily itineraries, and consequently we managed to get the best out of our visit given the circumstances. Our day at the reservoirs and rice fields was particularly productive. We saw large flocks of Little Bustard, Great Bustard, Stone-curlew and Common Crane, so many ducks it was impossible to count, and even three new species (all very scarce in the region) for this tour: Red-knobbed Coot, Mediterranean Gull and Glossy Ibis. The last day ended with remarkable and impressive views of Otter and Spanish Imperial Eagle.

### Day 1

**Tuesday 22nd December**

We all met up at Madrid airport after flying in from different UK airports. Once we were all assembled and ready to leave the airport, we continued in our minibuses. We had a coffee stop as dusk was setting in. People in the front minibus managed to see Eurasian Eagle-Owl and Black-shouldered Kite, and we all saw Common Buzzards. It was dark when we arrived at Viña Las Torres Guest Lodge. Rooms were allocated and we went straight in to dinner. Our hosts explained the food we would be eating and where the wine came from; a ritual performed every night we ate here.

### Day 2

**Wednesday 23rd December**

Breakfast was served at 8am, and it was still dark until about 8.15am. We left just after 9am and headed north of Trujillo. Although it was foggy we could see plenty of small birds by the roadside. The first bird found in the fog was Thekla Lark, and we found a few Crested Larks later on. There were lots of Calandra Larks, Meadow Pipits and Corn Buntings. Also seen were Skylark, Linnet and Goldfinch, as well as countless Spotless Starlings and Lapwings that were to feature all day. As we drove down a track between fields the fog started to lift, then it closed in again, and then it started to lift... With the fog affecting visibility we went into Trujillo and visited the old square whilst our leaders went picnic shopping.

Later we drove east of Trujillo to the Belén Plain, where we had lunch by a crossroads. It proved to be a good location as we saw two flocks of Little Bustards, a wintering or early returning Great Spotted Cuckoo, four distant Griffon Vultures, and a Hoopoe flew closely by. Next we returned to the morning's foggy area - it was so different with no fog! There were still lots of small birds and this time we added Southern Grey Shrike, Firecrest, Great Tit and Chiffchaff to our bird list. Just up the road we saw a flock of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, and on a track off to the left we found lots of Black-bellied Sandgrouse and a lone Merlin. Also there were plenty of Red Kites around all day.

### Day 3

**Thursday 24th December**

It was another very foggy day so we headed up into the mountains, aiming to be above the valleys and the fog. A fine Great Egret fed on the edge of a pool where a couple of Shovelers were feeding quietly. We stopped at the Almonte River where a female Blue Rock Thrush showed well. We then stopped in Navezuelas for coffee

before heading up the Pico Villuercas mountain for lunch. Six Alpine Accentors were seen before lunch, but afterwards, when we were ready for a walk, they could not be found; however we enjoyed some stunning views.

On our return journey we stopped at two pools near Zorita where there were a few waders. We spotted Common Snipe, Black-winged Silt and Green Sandpiper; Chiffchaffs were acting like flycatchers, and a Merlin flew over. We arrived back in good time and had dinner in a restaurant in town where we were the only diners. We enjoyed a delightful meal with cava served with our dessert.

## Day 4

## Friday 25th December

As it was Christmas Day we had a later start at 8.30am with a pre-breakfast walk. It was a chilly morning with not many birds about, though the Sardinian Warblers did oblige occasionally. After breakfast we drove to Monfragüe and walked up to the Castillo where, unfortunately, it was very foggy. We gave it some time to lift but frustratingly it did not improve. A few Griffon Vultures were seen close too on the rock face near the vehicles as we walked down. After a coffee stop at Torrejón we drove to a remote spot for lunch at Jaraicejo. Here, during lunch, we saw huge numbers of Griffon Vultures and a few Black Vultures too. They were riding the thermals and at one point were joined by a large group of migrating White Storks, and another large flock of noisy Common Cranes going in the opposite direction! After lunch we found a very obliging Dartford Warbler.

Our next stop was at the reservoir at Arrocampo near Saucedilla. As the minibuses drove in, a Little Bittern flew across the channel, and then it flew across again when everyone was outside the vehicles watching. Purple Swamphen, Penduline Tit, a pair of Black-winged Kites and Kingfisher were a few of the species seen here. At our second stop about 60 Common Snipes took to the air, and a couple of elusive Bearded Reedlings (Tits) were spotted. There were also lots of Zitting Cisticolas and Chiffchaffs. Our last stop was by a known eagle-owl site on a cliff. We saw evidence of the presence of Eurasian Eagle-Owl (recently plucked feathers from a pigeon), but not the bird itself. In the evening we went back to the restaurant in Trujillo for our Christmas dinner.

## Day 5

## Saturday 26th December

We woke up to a fog free morning and little did we know that today was going to be so productive! Our first stop was in Trujillo for some shopping, but we were soon on our way south, stopping at Sierra Brava Reservoir. Here were huge rafts of Mallard and Shoveler in their thousands. There were also Teal, Wigeon, Common Shelduck and a few Gadwall mixed in amongst them. We then drove along the Campo Lugar road. Here we saw Great and Little Bustards, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Peregrine, and near the end of the road a large flock of Stone-curlew. There were also large numbers of Lapwing, larks, pipits and other small birds.

We stopped for coffee at a fuel station and bar outside Campo Lugar where there were over a hundred Jackdaws in a flock. We then drove to our lunch stop at the picnic site at Alcollarín Reservoir. On the way we drove along the dam wall and stopped just after to survey the huge flock of coots, finally finding a wintering Red-knobbed Coot amongst them with its slightly bluish bill. There was also a Black-necked Grebe amongst the large numbers of Little and Great Crested Grebes. In the distance was a large flock of Egyptian Geese and a solitary Spoonbill. After lunch we stood on the second dam by the spillway and saw a Grey Wagtail, passing Kingfisher and a few duck including Common Pochard. We drove around to the other side of the dam, crossing the dam wall where a small Unkindness of Ravens were enjoying their flight. On the other side, with the sun behind us, we found

Pintail amongst the thousands of ducks. There was also Common Sandpiper and we had very good views of two Firecrests.

We retraced our steps along the Campo Lugar road and at the start saw a surprise Mediterranean Gull, and later a large flock of Golden Plover with an attendant Ruff noted by people in the second minibus. Our next stop was at the Vegas Altas rice fields area where we stopped just off the road for Common Waxbill, Bluethroat, and a flock of Red Avadavats which now breed here. There were more Great Bustards and impressive numbers of calling Cranes everywhere we went and looked. A Black-shouldered Kite gave us impressive views when we stopped near the top of the ridge. On the drive back through Madrigalejo there were large numbers of Little Egret and we stopped by a Cattle Egret roost with thousands flying in, as well as 12 Glossy Ibis. We returned to the accommodation in the dark for a meal in the guest house.

## Day 6

## Sunday 27th December

After such a productive day with 88 species seen yesterday, how were we going to make our last day special? We started with extended views of an Otter at the Rio Almonte, on the way to Monfragüe. At the Castillo there was a group of Red Deer as well as hundreds of passing vultures. On the rock face there was a Short-toed Treecreeper working its way up the edge. At the gorge two Peregrines flew about the top amongst the abundant Griffon and plentiful Cinereous (Black) Vultures, while a fine male Sardinian Warbler was seen by a few in nearby bushes.

We stopped at Villarreal de San Carlos for coffee and to visit the visitor centre. At lunch by the dam area, picnic preparation was interrupted when a large Wild Boar was sighted. This was followed by two adult Bonelli's Eagles flying along the valley! After lunch we had a short walk, spotting another Short-toed Treecreeper, a small flock of Chaffinch, and three Crested Tits; one showing and calling for all to see and hear. We then drove to Portilla del Tiétar where there were a lot more Griffon Vultures. A Spanish Imperial Eagle flew in and was relocated perched low in a tree. Soon there were two adults and an immature flying about in display flight! The female also landed by a nest located high in a tree for all to see. It was difficult to decide on what to concentrate, as incredibly there were also three Otters (adult female and two cubs) in the water below them, playing and fishing, while being closely watched by a Grey Heron looking for scraps! It was certainly a great end to the day and the trip.

## Day 7

## Monday 28th December

After breakfast we departed for the airport, stopping for refreshment on the way. We also kept our eyes open for birds during the drive, and sightings included Common Crane, Kestrel and Common Buzzard. We arrived slightly early at the airport, and for those departing from T4, the check in was quick and painless, and there were no queues through security. John took the rest of our group direct to T1 for their slightly later return flight.

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## Bird Species List (✓ = seen but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			22	23	24	25	26	27	28
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			6		140		
2	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>					95		
3	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>					18		
4	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>					60		
5	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>					✓		
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			2	2	✓	2	
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>			2		✓		
8	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>					6		
9	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>					✓		
10	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>					✓		
11	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>					✓		
12	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			1	1	✓	1	
13	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>					✓		
14	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>					3		
15	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		1	3	90	10	200	
16	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>					1		
17	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>				1			
18	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				10	2000	12	
19	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		1	1	1	12	6	
20	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			1	1	10	1	
21	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				2	160		
22	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>					12		
23	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				35	✓	30	
24	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	1			2	1		
25	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		4	44	200	5	✓	
26	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		1		8	3	18	
27	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>				1		3	
28	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>					2		
29	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>						2	
30	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	1				
31	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				5	6		
32	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		12	3	9	2	4	
33	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	6	1	2	4	3	2	✓
34	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>					64		
35	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>		47			43		
36	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>				4			
37	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				2			
38	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				17	✓		
39	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>					1		
40	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>				54	800	9	✓
41	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>					67		
42	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			2				
43	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		150	✓	✓	✓	✓	
44	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		10			120		
45	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			3	60		2	
46	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			1	1			
47	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>					2		
48	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>					1		
49	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		1	1	1	✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			22	23	24	25	26	27	28
50	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>					1		
51	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		3	1		✓		
52	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>		52			22		
53	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		32					
54	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>						✓	
55	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
56	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>		1					
58	Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	1				1		
59	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1				1		
60	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		3					
61	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				2	2		
62	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		3	1	2	8	6	
63	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>						1	
64	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		6	1	1	5	2	✓
65	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		1	1				
66	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>					1	2	
67	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		4	1	2	12	1	
68	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			1			2	
69	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>		20	3	8	6	35	
70	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
71	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		20			150		
72	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		5		2	12	2	
73	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>						3	
74	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			4	3	2	5	
75	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		2	2	3		2	
76	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>				2			
77	Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>				2			
78	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>					4		
79	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		19			✓		
80	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		16		2	2		
81	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		8		1	✓	1	
82	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		90			✓		
83	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>				1			
84	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		12	15	8	12	2	
85	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			1	3	2		
86	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>					✓	✓	
87	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		3	7	16	✓	✓	
88	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			2	5	2		
89	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1	2	1	1		
90	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				4			
91	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		1	8	3		4	
92	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		1			2		
93	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		2	2				
94	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			2				
95	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>						2	
96	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		2					
97	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
98	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		2	5	4	3	6	
99	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			3	1	2	1	
100	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		3					

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			22	23	24	25	26	27	28
101	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			1	2	1	4	
102	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>				1	1		
103	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		4	1	5	5	3	
104	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			1				
105	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
106	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
107	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
108	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>					3		
109	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>					3		
110	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>					15		
111	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>			6				
112	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			1	1			
113	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					2	1	
114	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
115	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
116	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>				3			
117	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			3	5		29	
118	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			2	5		2	
119	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				1	8	2	
120	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		35	50		200		
121	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	4	2		3	
122	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		10	7	50	✓		
123	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			5				
124	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	15	1	30	12	
125	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			1		1		

### Other Species List

	Common name	Scientific name	December						
			22	23	24	25	26	27	28
1	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>						1	
2	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓						
3	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>						15	
4	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>						1	
5	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>						4	
6	Iberian Mole	<i>Talpa iberica</i>	✓						
7	Grass Processionary Moth	<i>Thaumetopoea herculeana</i>		✓					
8	Common Yellow Scorpion	<i>Buthus occitanus</i>		1					
9	Egyptian Grasshopper	<i>Anacridium aegyptium</i>					1		
10	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>				1	1	1	
11	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>					1		
12	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>					1		

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