

# Spain – Extremadura in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

15th – 21st November 2023



Griffon Vulture



Pin-tailed Sandgrouse



Little Owls



Rio Magasca

Tour report by Nicola Scatassi, photos by Andy Hartley



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Tour participants: Nicola Scatassi & Pete Stevens (leaders) with 14 Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Wednesday 15th November**

The main group from London, with Pete, met the other participants and the other tour leader Nicola at Madrid airport, arrival hall terminal 4, shortly after 3.00pm. We then sorted out the vehicles and by 4.00pm we left towards Extremadura, heading southwest. During the drive we noticed a few White Storks and a few Red Kites, a single Common Buzzard and a single Sparrowhawk, along with ubiquitous House Sparrows and Spotless Starlings. After a quick stop, we reached our accommodation just after 7.00pm, already in the dark. We had dinner at 8.00pm, in the company of a couple of Moorish Geckoes looking for insects in the wall.

## Day 2

**Thursday 16th November**

We had breakfast at 8.00am, this time in the company of a Stripeless Tree-frog, and then left towards Trujillo, in a rather thick fog. While Pete went to the supermarket, Nicola and the group had a stroll around the pond not far from the bull ring, where we found a few Shovelers, a couple of Gadwalls, several Little Grebes and Mallards, and dozens of Coots and Moorhens, plus a single Mute swan. A nice singing male Serin was seen well. We then headed to Santa Marta de Magasca, making a few stops along the road, which produced our first Iberian Magpies and Iberian Shrikes, several Red Kites (by far the commonest raptor of the day), Crested and Calandra Larks, and a single huge Cinereous Vulture perched on the ground: impressive! After a spell of drier conditions, fog rose again, and we then drove to the local café in Santa Marta and had our picnic in the nearby picnic site. The fog disappeared, and we soon started to see quite a lot of big raptors, including perched Griffon and more Cinereous Vultures. We then continued towards Cáceres, and a nice stop at the bridge on the Magasca River produced a lot of Crag Martins, more vultures, one Spanish Terrapin, Kingfisher and Green Sandpiper, and best of all two Otters playing in the water! What a sight! More stops along the road resulted in good sightings which included a juvenile Golden Eagle, seen well, and shortly afterwards a juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle, again seen very well! Hundreds of Lapwings were scattered everywhere in the open areas, while Stonechats were quite common as well, as were Meadow Pipits. A few Red-legged Partridges were flushed along the road. Several Hoopoes were also seen, always a nice bird indeed. We were now not too far from Cáceres, when a single Great Bustard was seen, eventually: good scope views were had, and in the meantime a group of over 20 Little Bustards was also seen in flight, only to disappear behind a hill. A couple of Little Owls were seen very well at close quarters, much to our delight. Everybody was really happy by now, and we drove back to Las Canteras, in time for some rest before dinner.

## Day 3

**Friday 17th November**

The famous Monfragüe National Park was our destination today, and we headed towards it right after breakfast: our first stop was along the Almonte river, where we saw our first several Greenfinches among other passerines which included Cetti's Warbler, Robin, Chiffchaff, Black Redstart and a few others. A single Green Sandpiper was also seen, while Crag Martins were particularly numerous. After a brief stop in Torrejón el Rubio to buy some supplies for the day, our next stop was the well-known Peñafalcon, or Salto del Gitano, a site that never disappoints: large numbers of Griffon Vultures were present here, allowing for stunning views, and several Cinereous were also seen, while a single Peregrine Falcon appeared in flight and then perched. A pair of Blue Rock Thrush was seen quite close for a long time, while other goodies included Sardinian Warbler, Black Redstart and Short-toed Treecreeper. Our picnic lunch was then held in Villareal de San Carlos, where we started to see the first

of numerous Red Deer at close quarters. Among the birds seen here several Siskin were appreciated, as well as a couple of Thekla's Larks which could be positively identified. Iberian Magpies were quite showy along the road, as well as several more Red Deer. A stop in a mixed woodland area produced quite a few nice birds, including several Hawfinches, both Firecrest and Goldcrest, a couple of Crested Tits and our first distant Crane of the tour. At the Portilla del Tietar more Cranes passed right above our heads, a flock of over 40 individuals: a real treat indeed. On our way back a gorgeous Black-winged Kite allowed for great scope views! This is a species which is often quite tricky to find, so we were particularly happy. A single Dartford Warbler was then seen by a couple of participants close to our accommodation.

## Day 4

## Saturday 18th November

We had a rather early breakfast today as our idea was to explore the Monroy road at first light, and so we did, but unfortunately an unpredicted thick fog failed to lift up until well after 9.00am, when we decided to change area, and therefore only few birds could be seen, and the only new one was Rock Sparrow. Our next stop was then the open fields after the small village of Belen, and this proved to be the right choice: at first we saw a couple of Cranes on the ground, though a bit far from us, then a nice Little Owl was spotted, and then a flock of 15 Little Bustards flew in and landed not too far from us, allowing for good views in our scopes...what a bird! Soon after another flock of 7, followed by 3 more individuals, was seen, and at the same time a single Great Bustard was found, and again the views in the scope were not bad at all! A Merlin was then seen a sit was chasing a Crested Lark, and more and more vultures, both Griffon and Cinereous, appeared as the temperatures rose, reaching 21 degrees! A few more Crane flocks was seen in flight, and several Iberian Grey Shrikes and Iberian Magpies were noted. A pleasant stroll produced three butterflies species, Red Admiral, Clouded Yellow and Small Copper, and a few Common Darters were also seen. After our picnic lunch we paid a visit to the beautiful old town of Trujillo, always well worth seeing and much appreciated by everyone. In the late afternoon, we headed back to our accommodation, where another pleasant stroll in the beautiful evening light and with a lovely mild temperature produced more sightings of the usual species, while a single Zitting Cisticola was seen in the garden.

## Day 5

## Sunday 19th November

No fog at all this morning, so after breakfast we left in already glorious sunshine towards the Arrocampo area near Saucedilla, a well-known wetland area. One of the first birds seen was a Barn Swallow, only the second of the tour. We then started to see more birds in and around the vast reedbeds, including a few Western Swamphens which gave brief but good views. A rather large grebe was resting on the water by the reedbeds, and when it moved a bit was positively identified as a Red-necked Grebe, an interesting observation as this is a typically eastern species, and rare in Spain. Another Black-winged Kite was seen well in flight as it dived in a very scenic way, while 6 Black-crowned Night Herons were spotted on some nearby trees. Penduline Tits could be heard several times but failed to show, while other passerines included Cetti's and Dartford Warblers, Zitting Cisticola and a few Common Waxbills. A couple of small flocks of Cranes passed by, while some White Storks were still present in the area and a few Common Snipes were noted. As we were trying to reach another hide to overlook the reedbeds, unfortunately one of the vans got stuck in the mud, but luckily it took us only a few minutes to find a couple of very kind local guys that rescued us with their 4x4 vehicle, while the participants were preparing the picnic on their own this time. After lunch we drove back through Monfrague National Park, having a nice stroll that produced a single Nuthatch among the big Cork oak trees. We stopped again at Portilla del Tietar and at the Salto del Gitano, admiring once

more the impressive vultures always present here, before reaching our accommodation for a well-deserved rest and dinner.

## Day 6

**Monday 20th November**

Right after breakfast we briefly tried once again the Monroy road, but a thick fog wouldn't lift up, so we soon headed towards Trujillo, bought some food and drove to the Alcollarin reservoir. Here several thousand birds were present, the vast majority consisting in Northern Shovelers, followed by Great Crested Grebes: the Shovelers numbered easily over 4000, while the grebes probably over one thousand - amazing numbers. Intense scanning with our scopes then revealed a few Gadwalls, Wigeons and Pintails, plus of course several Mallards. Other birds included Cranes, one of which was particularly obliging and allowed for good views and photos, some 20 Spoonbills, numerous White Storks, Cormorants and Black-headed gulls, while two or three Marsh Harriers patrolled the area. Eventually good views of a pure Spanish Sparrows were had, and not far from the lake we could see their curious hanging nests on some Eucalyptus trees. As usual, Chiffchaffs seemed to be ubiquitous! After one last picnic lunch under the shade of Holm Oaks, we then moved towards Campo Lugar, but nothing special was found in this area. We then decided to give one more go the Monroy road, close to our accommodation, and this time of course the fog wasn't there anymore: quite strangely, we couldn't find any bustards, but eventually, we had great views of a flock of well over 200 Pin-tailed Sandgrouses, always an elegant and wonderful bird to watch, and probably the best observation of the week! This made a glorious end to a very enjoyable break in the sunshine of Extremadura, full of birds, good food and good company!

## Day 7

**Tuesday 21st November**

After our last breakfast at Las Canteras, it was time to set off heading towards Madrid airport in time for our early afternoon flights; we had planned to have a quick stop en route at Arrocampo, but again a rather thick fog forced us to keep on driving and having a leisurely coffee stop further on. During the drive we managed to add two new species to our list, a female Hen Harrier and a few Monk Parakeets, while several Griffon and Cinereous vultures could still be seen, along with White Storks, a nice flock of Cattle Egrets and the ubiquitous Red Kites. We arrived at the airport in good time, having met no traffic except for the very last kilometres.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	November 2023						
		15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>		✓			✓	✓	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓				✓	
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>						✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓				✓	
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>						✓	
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓			✓	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓			✓		
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>						✓	
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>					✓		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>						✓	
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>					✓		
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>					✓		
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>		✓					✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓			✓	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>					✓	✓	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			✓		✓		
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓					
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		✓					
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓		✓				
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>							✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		✓		✓			
Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>		✓		✓			
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>					H		
Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>					✓		
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓				✓	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓				✓	
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		✓				✓	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					✓		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>						✓	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓	✓			H	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓				✓	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓		✓		✓	
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		✓				✓	
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>						✓	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>						✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓

Common name	Scientific name	November 2023						
		15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Monk parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>							✓
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓		H		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		✓		✓			
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓				
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>			✓				
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			✓				
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>					H		
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓		✓			
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>			✓			✓	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓		✓		✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓		✓		
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H		✓		
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓			✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			H	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓		✓		
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>			✓		✓		
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			✓				
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓				
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓				
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>					✓		
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			✓		H		
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓					
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓					
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>						✓	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			✓		✓		
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>						✓	
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				✓			
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>					✓		
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓		✓		

Common name	Scientific name	November 2023						
		15	16	17	18	19	20	21
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			✓				
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓				
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓			✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	

## Others (D = Dead)

Common name	Scientific name	November 2023						
		15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓		✓			
Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>					D		
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>		✓					
European Rabbit	<i>Orytolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓					
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>			✓				
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Iberian Pond Turtle	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>		✓		✓			
Iberian Water Frog	<i>Rana perezi</i>		✓		✓		✓	
Stripeless Tree Frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>					✓		
Small White	<i>Artogeia rapae</i>		✓		✓			
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>					✓		
Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>						✓	
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		✓		✓			
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓		✓			
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>					✓		
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>				✓	✓	✓	
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>					✓	✓	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓					
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>		✓					
Egyptian Grasshopper	<i>Anacridium aegyptium</i>							
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>		✓		✓			
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>				✓	✓		