

Gibraltar & Tarifa: Whales, Dolphins & Autumn Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

14 - 18 September 2017



Barbary Macaque



Striped Dolphin



Griffon Vulture



Red-veined Darter

Report and images by Niki Williamson and Simon Tonkin



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Simon Tonkin & Niki Williamson (leaders) together with 10 Naturetrek clients

Summary

Avian migration was in full swing for this tour, based at the tranquil eco-lodge of Huerta Grande near Tarifa, and it yielded spectacular close-up views of hundreds upon hundreds of raptors and other soaring birds including Booted, Short-toed and Bonelli's Eagles, Montagu's Harriers, European Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures and Black Storks. Hirundines, swifts, European Bee-eaters and other migrant passerines also poured through in their hundreds. On a boat trip into the Strait of Gibraltar, the group had breath-taking close-up encounters with Long-finned Pilot Whales, as well as Black and Sandwich Terns, Audouin's Gulls, and Cory's and Scopoli's Shearwaters. Other birding highlights of farmland, wetland, inter-tidal habitat and cork oak forest included Red-necked Nightjar, Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, Crested Tit, Kentish Plover and Whiskered Tern. A day trip to Gibraltar also brought the group face-to-face with Barbary Macaques and Two-tailed Pasha butterflies.

Day 1

Thursday 14th September

Our flight from the UK arrived on time into the small airport at Gibraltar. We were met by Simon and Niki, who welcomed us to their home in the Strait!

We completed the short journey to our accommodation at Huerta Grande Eco-lodge in two comfortable minibuses, spotting several White Storks, Booted Eagles and Griffon Vultures on the way. Once there, we were greeted warmly by owner Katrin and the team. Before settling into our rooms, we were treated to a light buffet lunch and a glass of wine, during which we were serenaded by calling Crested Tit, Firecrest and Short-toed Treecreeper. Huerta Grande is set within the cork oak forests of the Los Alcornacales Park, so these resident woodland birds are never far away! Since the wind was *poniente*, or westerly, we could see numerous raptors passing overhead and we were glad to have our binoculars handy!

We had a little time to settle in before we headed out to nearby El Algorrobo watchpoint, in the hope of getting our first close-up views of raptors. We weren't disappointed as the late afternoon wave of migration was in full swing. We were thrown right into the midst of it and enjoyed the spectacle of over 300 Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Griffon Vultures and Eurasian Sparrowhawks overhead, as well as a Western Osprey, two Egyptian Vultures and over 50 very low European Bee-eaters. The hirundine and swift passage was busy too, with Sand, House and Crag Martins, Barn and Red-rumped Swallows, and Alpine, Common and Pallid Swifts all joining the throng. As if to finish the day on a high, as we were leaving a huge wave of over a hundred Alpine Swifts swept low over our heads!

We returned happy to Huerta Grande, in time for a refreshing gin and tonic before our first taste of chef Juan Carlos's delicious Spanish food!

Day 2

Friday 15th September

This morning, after a relaxed breakfast, we headed straight for Cazalla viewpoint. This site provides stunning views over Tarifa bay, but is also a great spot to pick up raptors leaving their roosts in the surrounding wooded

hills. Local knowledge of wind and weather conditions is vital to ensure the best raptor-watching experiences in the area, as these define when and where the biggest raptor concentrations will be. Sure enough, we were able to pick up some stunning morning views of powered flyers like Booted Eagles and European Honey Buzzards moving along the coast, and long-winged Short-toed Eagles perched on pylons and rocks, gathering strength for the journey ahead.

Moving on to our next site, we made a stop in the seaside town of Bolonia to re-energise with coffee and ice cream! Once we had had our fill, we continued to Sierra de la Plata, taking in the spectacular views down onto the roman ruins of Baelo Claudia. We enjoyed memorable views of Griffon Vultures perched up on the rocks, and we were also treated to a show from a dapper Blue Rock Thrush!

We took our picnic lunch further round the hillside, opposite a colony of 100+ Griffon Vultures. We were able to see close up these impressive birds perching on and circling round the rocks. Our timing was spot on as many raptors were now drifting round this part of the coast, and we had further amazing views of Booted and Short-toed Eagles and European Honey Buzzard, whilst Crag Martins and Lesser Kestrels flitted around the rocks. We were all thrilled when two Bonelli's Eagles powered into view, an adult and an immature bird flying together.

In the afternoon we continued to the low intensity agricultural land at La Janda. Once a vast wetland, this area was drained in Franco's time, but its rice paddies and low intensity grazed areas are still great for wildlife and hint at the site's former glory. It wasn't long before we were looking at huge flocks of White Storks, Greater Flamingoes, Eurasian Spoonbills, Little Egrets and Glossy Ibis. Among these lanky birds moved a fine array of waders including Green Sandpiper, Northern Lapwing, Common Snipe, Black-winged Stilt and Ruff. We also enjoyed a Whiskered Tern bobbing across the pools. We had stunning views of two immature Montagu's Harriers, and were astounded at the concentration of Marsh Harriers, with 20+ being counted around the rice fields.

Moving to the upland area of the farm, we encountered impressive flocks of over 2,000 Wood Pigeons, currently migrating through the area. But Simon and Niki had saved a surprise till last! Parking up, we walked quietly alongside a strip of trees and bushes by the farm track. We scoured the leaf litter with our optics and it wasn't too long before we were staring speechless at an exquisite Red-necked Nightjar, roosting just metres from where we stood, almost completely invisible until you knew where to look!

We returned to Huerta Grande on a high, ready to celebrate!

Day 3

Saturday 16th September

After another delicious Huerta Grande breakfast we set off promptly for Gibraltar, arriving in good time and successfully avoiding the queues that can occasionally be encountered at the cable car later in the day. We took the cable car up to Top Rock, where we enjoyed close encounters with mischievous Barbary Macaques and some great photographic opportunities. Among the many calling Sardinian Warblers, we could also hear a Blue Rock Thrush singing somewhere on the Rock!

Arriving back down, we wandered round the lovely Alameda Gardens. The plants here, both native and introduced, make it a great place for butterflies. We had lovely views of tiny Geranium Bronze and Lang's Short-tailed Blue, massive Monarchs, and Two-tailed Pashas – Europe's largest butterfly.

Next stop was Europa Point where we took our picnic by the sea, looking out from the UK's most southerly point! We spent a pleasant time observing seabirds, with views of Audouin's and Mediterranean Gulls among the Yellow-legged Gulls, Cory's Shearwaters, and Northern Gannets. A large mosque dominates the skyline here, and as the mid-afternoon call to prayer rang out, we had a rather moving moment with several European Honey Buzzards, which passed between the minarets.

After pausing briefly for ice cream, we headed over the border and back to finish the day at El Algorrobo raptor watchpoint, to make use of the warm afternoon and the gentle *poniente* conditions. Many raptors were doing the same! As well as many dozens more heart-stopping eagle views, we encountered a Western Osprey, two Egyptian Vultures, a Montagu's Harrier and a flock of elegant Black Storks. When we remembered to occasionally look down, we were treated to lovely views of a Swallowtail butterfly and an intriguing Egyptian Mantis.

Day 4

Sunday 17th September

Today we started the day at Cazalla watchpoint, calling in briefly to get our early morning raptor fix.

Moving on, we visited the inter-tidal habitat of Los Lances, where we had lovely views of Crested and Greater Short-toed Larks on the coastal pastureland. A selection of waders including Oystercatcher, Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Sanderling, Dunlin, Common Redshank and Bar-tailed Godwit were showing well in the pools and on the beach. Two Audouin's Gulls were also showing well in a group of predominantly Yellow-legged Gulls.

Heading to Tarifa, we went straight to a café overlooking the marina to refresh before our long-awaited boat trip! We were soon aboard our boat, run by responsible whale-watching and research firm, Turmares. We had fantastic viewing seats and a calm sea. As we entered the deeper part of the Strait we had encounters with a great variety of seabirds. Both Cory's and Scopoli's Shearwaters were shearing by, along with Northern Gannets and Great Skuas. We were also in the middle of a large movement of Black Terns, and we were surrounded by well over 50 birds as well as 10+ Sandwich Terns when we found ourselves close to a fishing vessel.

The marine life too was diverse, with views of the bizarre dustbin-lid shaped Sunfish, a Hammerhead Shark, and six Striped Dolphin scudding by. But the stars of the show were the Long-finned Pilot Whales, which today had decided to offer us breath-taking close-up views! Finding a group of combined family groups numbering over twenty individuals, we simply floated quietly for over an hour while they swam curiously around the boat and often surfaced right alongside! It was a long and extremely moving encounter with these beautiful, sociable, intelligent creatures.

After reaching shore we headed straight to the raptor watchpoint at El Trafico for a late picnic lunch, where we could look across the Strait to Morocco's Jebel Musa mountain and reflect on our joyous boat trip! Relaxing in the afternoon sun with a glass of wine and a selection of salads and local cheeses, chorizos and hams, we also

enjoyed the last of the afternoon's raptor activity as Short-toed and Booted Eagles drifted by, hunting along the coast. We also explored the excellent display at the Observatorio del Estrecho, staffed by the wonderful Fundacion Migres, who have been monitoring avian migration across the Strait for over 20 years.

Day 5

Monday 18th September

Today it was time to say "Hasta luego!" to the Strait and the Huerta Grande team. Before breakfast, some explored the contents of the moth trap Simon and Niki had set up the night before. We enjoyed seeing delightful Buff-tips and Mediterranean Tigers before our final Huerta Grande breakfast.

We then left Huerta Grande and arrived at Gibraltar airport in plenty of time to enjoy refreshments on the airport terrace overlooking the Rock.

Simon and Niki had had a fabulous time on the tour and thanked the group for being brilliant company and loads of fun throughout. They can only imagine what the group thought as we were boarding the plane and turned to see them still there, waving us off! Simon and Niki hope you'll keep in touch and come see us again soon!

The return flight landed back in the UK, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!



Egyptian Mantis sp

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	September				
			14	15	16	17	18
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		1			
2	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		10+			
3	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		6			
4	Scopoli's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>				2+	
5	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>			5+	5+	
6	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>		5+			
7	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	1		18	20	
8	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	30+	300+	✓		
9	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		162			
10	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		6			
11	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		2			
12	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	5+	1,000+		✓	
13	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		10+	1		
14	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		20+		5+	
15	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			2+	1+	
16	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				1	
17	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1		1		
18	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	2		2		
19	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	50+	2+	30+	20+	
20	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	20+	70+	20+	✓	
21	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	30+	20+	10+	50+	
22	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	150+	50+	30+	50+	
23	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>		2			
24	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	10+	15+	10+	20+	
25	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		20+		1	
26	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	1	2+	1		
27	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	c.15		3+		
28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2			
29	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		1			
30	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		10+			
31	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>				2	
32	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		8+			
33	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		20+			
34	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				80+	
35	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>				10+	
36	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		2+			
37	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				8	
38	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				1	
39	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		10+			
40	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>				1	
41	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		1			
42	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				100+	
43	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				10+	
44	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			20+		
45	Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>			1	3	
46	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>			2		
47	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	September				
			14	15	16	17	18
48	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		1	✓	10+	
49	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				10+	
50	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>		1			
51	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>				40+	
52	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>				3	
53	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
54	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		2,000+		1	
55	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
56	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		1+		2	
57	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		1+		1	
58	Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>		1			
59	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	200+	10+			
60	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	10+	3+		2	
61	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	5+	10+			
62	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	50+			50+	
63	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1		1		
64	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		30+	10+	15+	
65	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				1	
66	Kestrel sp.	<i>Falco sp.</i>			2+	5+	
67	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓			
68	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	2	2	2	
69	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	1+	3+	2	2	
70	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	4+		✓	✓	
71	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	6+	2+	✓	✓	
72	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>				3+	
73	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>				10+	
74	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	5+			1	
75	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	50+	15+			
77	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	10+	2+			
78	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	5+	6+		3+	
79	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	1+	1+		1	
80	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓		
81	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus</i>	1	1+	2+	1	
82	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		2+		4+	
83	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	10+	10+	10+	✓	
84	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			1		
85	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	4	5+	3+	2+	
87	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	3+	6+	2	
88	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			1		
89	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	10+	2	4+	1+	
90	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
91	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1+	1+	✓	1+	
92	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			3+		
93	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	2+	1+	10+	3	
94	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	1				
95	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		2	1h		
96	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓		✓	
97	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
98	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		✓		50+	

	Common name	Scientific name	September				
			14	15	16	17	18
99	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	2			1	
100	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	10+	10+	✓	✓	
101	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		1+	2+		
102	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓			
103	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
104	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	2+		20+		
105	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>				20+	

Mammals

1	Striped Dolphin	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>				6	
2	Long-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala melas</i>				20+	
3	Barbary Macaque	<i>Macaca sylvanus</i>			✓		

Fish

1	Sunfish	<i>Mola mola</i>				1	
2	Hammerhead Shark sp.					1	

Dragonflies

1	Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>			✓	✓	
2	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>		✓			

Butterflies & Moths

1	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>			✓	✓	
2	Geranium Bronze	<i>Cacyreus marshalli</i>	✓		✓	✓	
3	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>			✓		
4	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>			✓	✓	
5	Two-Tailed Pasha	<i>Charaxes jasius</i>			9		
6	Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>	✓		✓		
7	Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>		✓	✓		
8	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>				✓	
9	Chinese Character	<i>Cilix glaucata</i>					✓
10	Humming-bird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>			1		
11	Oak Hooktip	<i>Watsonalla binaria</i>					✓
12	Dorset Cream Wave	<i>Stegania trimaculata</i>					✓
13	Bufftip	<i>Phalera bucephala</i>					✓
14		<i>Campaea honoraria</i>					✓
15	Scarce Footman	<i>Manulea complana</i>					✓
16	Mediterranean Tiger	<i>Cymbalophora pudica</i>					✓
17	Least Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua interjecta</i>					✓
18	Lunar Thorn	<i>Selenia lunularia</i>					✓
19	Canary-shouldered Thorn	<i>Ennomos alniaria</i>					✓

Reptiles

1	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanica</i>	✓		✓		
2	Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Others

1	Egyptian Mantis sp.	<i>Miomantis sp.</i>			✓		
2	Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Fiddler Crab sp.	<i>Uca sp.</i>				✓	