

Gibraltar & Tarifa: Whales, Dolphins & Autumn Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

16 - 20 September 2018



Barbary Macaque

Report compiled by Simon Tonkin
Images courtesy of Deborah Woollacott



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Tour participants: Simon Tonkin (leader) and a group of eight Naturetrek clients

Summary

Avian migration was in full swing for this tour based at the tranquil eco-lodge of Huerta Grande near Tarifa. It yielded spectacular views of hundreds of soaring birds, including Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Montagu's Harriers, European Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures and Black Storks as they migrated across the Straits of Gibraltar. On a boat trip into the Straits themselves, the group had breath-taking close-up encounters with Bottlenose Dolphins and Long-finned Pilot Whales, as well as Cory's and Balearic Shearwaters. Other highlights of farmland, wetland, inter-tidal habitat and Cork Oak forest included a day-roosting Red-necked Nightjar, flocks of wintering Eurasian Stone-curlews, Firecrests, Crested Tits, Kentish Plovers, Red-rumped Swallows, Audouin's Gulls and Northern Bald Ibis. A day trip to Gibraltar also brought the group face-to-face with Barbary Macaques and Two-tailed Pasha, as well as encountering a spectacular migratory push of Booted Eagles leaving from around The Rock to head for the other 'pillar of Hercules' - the Jebel Musa in Africa.

Day 1

Sunday 16th September

After meeting up at Gibraltar airport we were soon on our way, and it didn't take long to drive the short distance to Huerta Grande Rural Eco-lodge, our accommodation for the coming nights. On arrival, we got out of the van and immediately saw Griffon Vultures cruising overhead. The group took their lunch, as 'bag fairies' ensured that everyone's bag was delivered to their room. After a bit of time to relax and get organised we set off up the coast to the raptor watchpoint of Cazalla.

Here we watched as Short-toed and Booted Eagles battled into the *levante* – or easterly - wind, looking for an opportunity to cross the Straits of Gibraltar to their wintering grounds in Africa. We watched, hearts in mouths, as 37 Black Storks lose confidence halfway across the narrow but treacherous stretch of water and head back to land. Several Egyptian Vultures appeared. We soon got to grips with wing shapes and identification criteria for each of the raptors, and it wasn't too long before the group was readily identifying them for themselves! Pretty impressive stuff considering these were new species for most of the group. We also observed our first Honey Buzzards, both juveniles and adults, and discussed the differences in appearance of the age classes for this and the other raptors. We had a great diversity of raptors drifting over and passed us, including Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Western Marsh Harriers and Montagu's Harriers.

We then decided to make a move for an ice cream! So, we headed up to the Mirador del Estrecho and here we had Griffon Vultures cruise overhead, while close Booted and Short-toed Eagles cruised by at eye level, joined by a band of Honey Buzzards, delighting the assembled ornithological paparazzi!

Day 2

Monday 17th September

Today we headed for an area of drained wetland at La Janda. The draining of this marsh is seen as one of Spain's biggest ecological disasters, but thanks to the rice farming and historical ecological memory of the area it still holds some fragments of its former glory. Here we were able to observe large groups of White Storks with

intermingling Black Storks, while both Marsh and Montagu's Harriers quartered the marsh, flushing groups of Glossy Ibis from their hiding places.

Moving up to higher ground we searched under trees with our optics for a brief period before finding a beautiful day-roosting Red-necked Nightjar! We viewed respectfully and quietly as we observed Europe's largest Nightjar at a respectful distance in respectful quiet awe.

We headed to a private area where we were happy to observe one of the world's rarest birds - the Northern Bald Ibis - feeding on irrigated turf. We observed the species and remarked on the successful conservation efforts to bring this enigmatic Ibis back to the area and to its rightful place in The Straits of Gibraltar.

Our last stop of the day was at the disused *salinas* or salt pans of Barbate. Here we were able to sift through the groups of Kentish and Common Ringed Plovers before a Western Osprey panicked the assembled wading bird species, causing them to swirl in impressive flocks. Hordes of Greater Flamingoes ensured a beautiful pink backdrop, and as individuals took flight, we commented on how they belonged more on the set of the film Avatar than in real life - totally amazing other-worldly birds. Scanning the stony islands in the lagoons, we found several Stone-curlews and discussed their conservation status and migratory behaviour as well as why they have both the English common name and are part of the "*Thick-knee*" Family. We also observed Audouin's Gulls at this internationally important wintering area for the species and discussed the recovery of this once incredibly rare species. Greater Short-toed Larks flitted and called across the paths.

Day 3

Tuesday 18th September

Today we went back to the UK! That is, we went the very short distance to Gibraltar. After the usual cursory glances at passports at the border we drove across the runway - an unusual experience for most! After parking we ascended the looming rock monolith by cable car. As soon as we disembarked, we were treated to fabulous views of migrating raptors. A huge number of Booted Eagles were on the move and we were treated to some of the best views possible as hundreds of them and other raptors passed over, around and even below us as part of a massive migratory event. We were also able to observe the antics of the Barbary Macaques which were assembled at their feeding stations.

Once we descended again in the cable car, we wandered through the Alameda Gardens where we searched for butterflies. Soon we found several Two-tailed Pashas - Europe's largest butterfly. We also watched Monarch butterflies, now established here throughout the year as an accidental introduction from North America.

Next, we headed for Europa Point, the southernmost point of Gibraltar, from where we could see several rafts of Cory's Shearwaters on the sea. We took our picnic lunch here, followed by the all-important ice-cream!

We headed back into Spain to engulf ourselves in the migratory event happening at Cazalla watchpoint. Large groups of both White and Black Storks, several Honey Buzzards and Black Kites were logged as we concluded the day and celebrated witnessing the very best of soaring bird migration.

Day 4

Wednesday 19th September

Today we started at the inter-tidal habitat of Los Lances, where we found Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Sanderling, Dunlin and six Bar-tailed Godwits. Among the groups of Yellow-legged and Lesser-black Backed Gulls, we watched Sandwich Terns coming to settle. Soon we headed into Tarifa where we walked through the old town to the Castillo de Guzman el Bueno. Here Simon recounted the historic story of this place whilst the group observed the comings and goings of the amazing Lesser Kestrels.

We then embarked on our boat into The Strait itself. We watched Cory's Shearwaters and a single Balearic Shearwater as they drifted past the boat and we encountered Bottlenose Dolphins. However, the stars for many were the pod of Long-finned Pilot Whales that came to our boat to check us out.

Following our boat trip, we headed to the coastal watchpoint of El Trafico. Here we were able to observe both Short-toed and Booted Eagles and Black Kites at close range before heading back to Huerta Grande to reflect on the day's sightings and an excellent time at the epicentre of migration in The Straits of Gibraltar.

Day 5

Thursday 20th September

Before packing up and leaving for the airport, some of us ensured we got our last sights and sounds of Short-toed Treecreepers, Common Firecrest and Crested Tits before making the short journey to Gibraltar airport and the group's own migration back to the UK.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	September			
			16	17	18	19
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓		
2	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓		
3	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>			50+	80+
4	Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>				1
5	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>		200+		
6	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	39	50+	70+	
7	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	20+	150+	400+	✓
8	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		50+		
9	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		5+		
10	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>		✓	✓	✓
11	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓		4
12	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		30+		4
13	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>				20+
14	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	2			
15	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		1		
16	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	10+			
17	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	10+	8+	30+	5+
18	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	20+	10+		4
19	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	150+	5+	20+	70+
20	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	200+	20+	700+	30+
21	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	30+	4+	15+	10+
22	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	5+	20+	1	
23	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	1	7	3	
24	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	20+	1	40+	20+
25	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		15+		
26	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>		9		
27	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		20+		
28	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓		✓
29	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>				5+
30	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		1		
31	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>				6
32	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				1
33	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		2		
34	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		3		
35	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓		✓
36	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓		10+
37	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓		
38	Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>		80+		25+
39	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓		✓
41	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>		2		
42	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>				4
43	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>		1		
44	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		10+		
46	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	1		1	

	Common name	Scientific name	September			
			16	17	18	19
48	Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i>		1		
49	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>			10+	
50	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	30+		3+	
51	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		1		
52	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1		1
53	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	3	10+	2	c.20
54	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓	
55	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		1		
56	European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>	2	1	2	1
57	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	3+	2	3	2
58	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	2		2	1
59	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	1			1
60	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓		✓
61	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>		13		
62	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓		✓
64	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>			4	
65	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				2
66	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus iberia</i>		3		1
67	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		5+		
68	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	1		6+	3
69	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>			✓	4
70	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	1	2	2	
71	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1		1	
72	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	1		4	2
73	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		3	1	
76	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1	✓	✓	5
77	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓
78	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1		
79	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓		
81	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		✓	1	10+
82	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	1		1
83	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				1
84	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>				1
85	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			1	
87	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		2	1	
88	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		4	2	5+
89	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	1		2	
91	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓		10+
92	Common Canary	<i>Serinus canaria</i>		✓		

Mammals

1	Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>				4
2	Long-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala melas</i>				15+
3	Barbary Macaque	<i>Macaca sylvanus</i>			✓	

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			16	17	18	19

Invertebrates

1	Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	✓		✓	✓
2	Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>			✓	
3	Banded Groundling	<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>		✓		
4	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>		✓		
5	Orange-winged Dropwing	<i>Trithemis kirbyi</i>			✓	✓
6	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	✓		10	1
7	Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>	✓			
8	Geranium Bronze	<i>Cacyreus marshalli</i>			2	
9	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Two-Tailed Pasha	<i>Charaxes jasius</i>			6	
13	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>			✓	✓
14	Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>			2	
15	Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>				2
16	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>			5	
17	Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>			✓	✓

Reptiles & Amphibians

1	Mediterranean Tree Frog	<i>Hyla meridionalis</i>	1			✓
2	Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>		1		✓
3	Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarantola mauritanica</i>			✓	✓
4	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanica</i>	✓		10+	✓
5	Iberian Pond Turtle	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>			3	

Other Tax

1	European Fiddler Crab	<i>Uca tangeri</i>				✓
2	Sunfish	<i>Mola mola</i>				3
3	Mediterranean Flying Fish	<i>Cheilopogon heterurus</i>				✓



Young Pilot Whale