

Go Slow... in Andalucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

18th – 24th September 2021



Short-toed Eagle

Report by Simon Tonkin



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Tour participants - Simon Tonkin & Niki Williamson (leaders) with 12 Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The weather, food - and of course the spectacular autumn raptor migration- did not disappoint during this laid back trip to Spain's Straits of Gibraltar.

Migrating raptors poured overhead in blue skies, and the groups were treated to views of Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, White and Black Storks as well as Bonelli's Eagle.

Boat trips brought us within a flipper's length of Common & Bottlenose Dolphins and inquisitive Long-finned Pilot Whales!

From our base in a beautifully restored traditional Spanish farmhouse, our groups enjoyed the best of autumn birding in Andalucia, including Northern Bald Ibis right in the grounds!

Wetland, farmland and mountain sites gave great views of delights like Black-winged Kites, Blue Rock Thrush, Alpine and Pallid Swift, European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Hoopoe, Temminck's and Little Stint.

Day 1

Saturday 18th September

Some of the group arrived early in the day, so after leaving the airport we made our way without further ado to encounter some raptor migration!

The café at Mirador del Estrecho provided the perfect introductory spot, and our guests were able to get their first surprising views of Africa, just 14km away across the sea, and to watch raptors gathering on the thermals above the Andalusian coastline.

Short-toed Eagles and Booted Eagles were numerous and swirled in impressive groups, interspersed with European Honey Buzzards. This spectacular flow continued further round the coast at the famous raptor watchpoint of Cazalla, where we stopped for our picnic lunch and watched hundreds more raptors cross out to see as well as 750 White Storks!

After a later pick up for the rest of the group, we were soon all gathered at our accommodation at Cortijo el Indiviso, a beautifully restored traditional style farmhouse, where we enjoyed our first meal together.

Day 2

Sunday 19th September

This morning after a delightful breakfast at the *cortijo*, and a chance for the group to get to know the expansive grounds in daylight, we headed straight down to the coast in anticipation of catching up with the migration spectacle everyone had come here to see!

To witness the full splendour takes local knowledge - you have to be in the right place at the right time in the right wind – so we headed down to the coast just outside the town of Tarifa.

As we arrived a single Egyptian Vulture was the first bird to attempt the crossing!

We saw six more of them crossing during the morning as well as European Honey Buzzard, Black Storks, White Storks and group after group of Booted Eagles and Short-toed Eagles – an impressive start to the trip!

We headed to the viewpoint of La Peña for our picnic lunch, with gorgeous views along Tarifa's Los Lances beach and across to Africa. As well as more raptors drifting over, we enjoyed seeing and hearing a family of Thekla's Larks up close. Above us, a flock of 54 White Storks tested the wind, perhaps in anticipation of a crossing the next day...

We headed back to the *cortijo* with plenty of time to relax before another delicious dinner.

Today we also enjoyed our first views of Northern Bald Ibis, regular visitors to the area around the *cortijo*.

Day 3

Monday 20th September

Today we headed to the rice and cotton fields of La Janda, where reed-fringed ditches and areas of habitat still provide a haven for wildlife despite the intensive agriculture in between.

As if to prove this, some of the first birds we spied were Turtle Doves perched by the track! This farmland bird whose fortunes in the UK are on such a downward spiral is now at least safe as it passes through Spain on migration, thanks to a moratorium on hunting the species in almost every area.

We had extraordinary views of a Black-winged Kite doing a good impression of an angel as it hovered on silvery wings, then a pair perched together on wires and trees near their nest site.

The huge flocks of Spanish and House Sparrows – numbering in their thousands – were a joy to experience, as were the large groups of White Storks and Glossy Ibis. We were also extremely pleased to catch up with Bonelli's Eagle!

Next up we headed out on our boat trip into The Straits, bringing us close to groups of Bottlenose and Common Dolphins! There were also fantastic views of Long-finned Pilot Whales, loafing right at the surface in family groups. Seabirds included Black and Sandwich Terns and some great views of Scopoli's Shearwaters and Balearic Shearwaters.

Spectacularly, we also found ourselves right under the flow of the raptor migration! Looking up from the boat we could see Honey Buzzards, Short-toed Eagles, Egyptian Vultures and Black Storks above us. Having run out of thermals and height, they were breathing hard and making powerful wingbeats to complete their treacherous crossing. It was very humbling to experience their journey in this way.

Day 4

Tuesday 21st September

Today we headed to the coast, this time to explore the Marismas de Barbate. These disused salt pans are now a nature reserve and we arrived to find them teeming with waders, gulls and flamingos!

As well as huge flocks of Dunlin and Sanderling and over 300 Common Ringed Plovers, highlights included Little Stint, Kentish Plover, Pied Avocet, Black-tailed Godwits, Redshank and Greenshank, Ruff and a single Temminck's Stint.

Audouin's Gulls, Greater Flamingos and Eurasian Spoonbills were great to see, and we enjoyed Greater Short-toed Larks, Woodchat Shrike and Eurasian Hoopoe. We were also thrilled to encounter three Northern Bald Ibis, this incredibly rare bird doing well in the area after a successful reintroduction programme in 2008.

We headed to the pine forest and scrublands - *breñas* – for a picnic lunch, and found ourselves once again under a migratory flow as European Bee-eaters, Honey Buzzards and eagles drifted overhead. Woodland passerines included Western Bonelli's Warbler, Iberian Chiffchaff, Willow and Garden Warbler, Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper and both Pied and Spotted Flycatchers.

Day 5

Wednesday 22nd September

This morning, after another fine leisurely breakfast with great coffee, and eggs from the *cortijo's* own chickens, we headed to the hills of Sierra de la Plata. This sight is perhaps best known to birders as the site of a Griffon Vulture colony which was the first place a Griffon Vulture was photographed on the nest.

Sure enough, as we arrived in the area we came across a valley filled with vultures, on the ground and hanging low in the air, having recently dined on a deceased cow. We counted well over a hundred – a spectacular if somehow chilling sight!

At a high point in the range sits the Cueva del Moro - an ancient dwelling which contains rock paintings. From here we had views of migrating Short-toed Eagles and Honey Buzzards as well as local mountain birds including Blue Rock Thrush, Alpine Swift, Crag Martin and Red-rumped Swallow.

At the colony itself we enjoyed the airborne grace of over 140 Griffon Vultures, soaring over our heads at their colony, and screeching from perches on the crag face.

After a spectacular morning savouring the natural highlights of the area, it was time to enjoy some cultural ones! We headed to the Old Town area of Tarifa and enjoyed a delicious, prolonged *tapas* lunch of many courses, followed by time to meander through the town's picturesque winding streets – and perhaps enjoy an afternoon ice cream.

Day 6

Thursday 23rd September

Today we would once again look to put ourselves in the midst of the area's migration bottleneck, but a stop *en route* to pick up freshly-baked bread soon earned our *panadería* the title of "Bakery of Dreams"! As we paused there, the first of the raptors were leaving their roosts in the surrounding hills and we found ourselves right under the early flow of Black Kites, which were passing over in droves!

The flow continued all morning, changing with the wind, as we moved with it between La Peña, Cazalla, and a sneaky ice cream stop at the Mirador del Estrecho! A quite spectacular day of migration followed - all in all we picked up 200 White Storks, 17 Black Storks, 16 Egyptian Vultures, 32 Honey Buzzards, a Western Osprey, 321 Short-toed Snake Eagles, 487 Black Kites and a staggering 946 Booted Eagles embarking on the most treacherous step of their epic journey to their wintering grounds.

Relaxing in the beautiful Andalusian countryside while hundreds of soaring birds drifted overhead was certainly a satisfying and fitting end to our experience of the area's spectacular autumn migration!

We headed back to our accommodation and enjoyed one final delicious three-course meal and toasted our successful and enjoyable trip.

Day 7

Friday 24th September

All too soon it was time to leave Tarifa and The Straits of Gibraltar behind and head home. Our lovely host Laura at the Cortijo was on hand to wave us off! Until next time.

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Checklist

Birds

			Date:					
	Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23
1	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓			1
2	Scopoli's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>			10			
3	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>			1			
4	Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>			3			
5	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>				253		120
6	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	10	17	18	2	1	17
7	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	750	84	200	23	✓	200
8	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		✓	✓	1		
9	Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>		7		3	4	
10	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				13		
11	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			5	4		
13	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	✓		1
14	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			1	5		
15	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					1	1
16	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			4			
17	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	4	8	4	3	1	16
18	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	10	1	2	4	3	32
19	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	20	30	✓	✓	140	40
20	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	700	100	20	1	20	321
21	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	1000	200	20	4	10	946
22	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>			2	2		
23	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	10	6	10	3	5	30
24	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		2	30	10	1	1
25	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			6	1		
26	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		1				
27	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	50	20	30	3	4	487
28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1		1		1	1
29	Atlas Long-legged Buzzard / Gibraltar Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus citensis/B. b. cirtensis</i>						1
30	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			1			
31	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				✓		
32	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				80		
33	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			2			
34	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				300		
35	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				1		
36	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>				50		
37	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				50		
38	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				20		
39	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				1		
40	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			4			
41	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				1		
42	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			20			
43	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>				3		
44	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>				1		
45	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			✓	✓		

			Date:					
	Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23
46	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓		
47	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>				4		
48	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>				✓		
49	Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>				54		
50	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>			3			
51	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓		
53	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		1	1	7		
54	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>			20			
55	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
57	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			2			
58	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	1		1	1	2	
60	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1		2	2	1	1
61	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarpis melba</i>	50	300	✓	✓	20	
62	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			✓	✓		
63	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
64	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			4			
65	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>			40	20		
66	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		1	2	2	1	1
67	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				1		
68	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		6	15			4
69	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2		1	2	3	2
70	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>					1	1
71	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>		1	1	1		
72	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	1		2		2	
74	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		2	2	4	2	2
75	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		2	✓	✓	4	4
76	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	2	8				4
77	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2
78	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>				3		
79	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓				
80	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		1		3	2	
81	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>					6	
83	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	50
85	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			✓		1	
86	Iberian Chiff-chaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		1	1	6		2
87	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				1		
88	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>				2		
89	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			2			
90	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>			1			
91	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		3	✓	✓		2
92	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓	✓	1	
93	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>				1		
94	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			1			
95	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

			Date:					
	Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23
96	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>				1		
97	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			1			1
98	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				3	1	1
99	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	1
101	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				6		
102	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>			1			
103	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		1		20		
104	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		1		1		
105	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>					3	
106	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		1		6		
107	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		6	✓	✓	✓	4
108	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1	1	1		2
109	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓			
111	Common Waxbill - I	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>			✓			
112	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
113	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		1		✓	✓	
114	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		2	✓	✓	2	2
115	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		2	✓	✓	4	4
116	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
117	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		4	3	3	2	6
118	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
119	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>					2	

Other

		Date:					
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>			✓			
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>			✓			
Long-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala melas</i>			✓			
Sunfish	<i>Mola mola</i>			✓			
Mediterranean Flying Fish	<i>Cheilopogon heterurus</i>			✓			
Banded Groundling	<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>			✓			
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓	✓		✓	
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓				
Geranium Bronze	<i>Cacyreus marshalli</i>					✓	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓				
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓			✓	
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓				
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>		✓				
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>		✓	✓			
Crimson Speckled Footman	<i>Utetheisa pulchella</i>				✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	Date:					
		18	19	20	21	22	23
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>			✓		✓	✓
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanicus</i>		✓	✓			
Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulea</i>					✓	
Egyptian Locust	<i>Anacridium aegyptium</i>						✓



European Bee-eater