

Go Slow in Andalucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 23rd September 2022

Tour report by Niki Williamson



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Summary

Here in The Straits of Gibraltar, at the narrowest point between Europe and Africa, wind and weather conditions combined to give our group an absolute Raptorfest! During the week we were privileged to witness many thousands of soaring birds gathering for the treacherous sea crossing including White Storks, Black Storks, Egyptian Vultures, Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Griffon Vultures, Short-toed Snake Eagles, Booted Eagles, Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, and Lesser Kestrels!

Among them were Alpine, Pallid and Common Swifts, hirundines galore, European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Hoopoes, Whinchats, Northern Wheatears, Yellow Wagtails, Tawny Pipit, Pied Flycatchers and more!

During our boat trip, we were surrounded by Bottlenose Dolphins, Long-finned Pilot Whales and wake-surfing Common Dolphins, as Wilson's Storm Petrels and Cory's and Balearic Shearwaters skimmed the waves.

Among the plethora of coastal, intertidal and wetland species, we found fantastic surprises in the form of Terek Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper and Rüppell's Vulture!

So much to see, but plenty of time to process it all while relaxing by the pool at our beautiful accommodation in a traditional Spanish farmhouse.

Day 1

Saturday 17th September

Simon and Niki connected with the group of Gibraltar arrivals in the afternoon and after brief border formalities we entered Spain and headed west, past Algeciras Bay and on along the European coastline of The Straits of Gibraltar.

We made a stop at the well-known raptor watchpoint of Cazalla, a great place for some local orientation. From here we looked out over Tarifa towards the mountain of Jebel Moussa in Morocco, the narrowest point between Europe and Africa – just 14 kilometres. To our left lay the Mediterranean and to our right the Atlantic – a real meeting point of continents and oceans.

The stop proved a great appetite-whetter for the days to come, with several dozen Black Storks, Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Egyptian Vulture, and more contemplating their crossing of the sea to Africa, even at this time in the late afternoon.

Then it was on to Cortijo el Indiviso, where we settled into our accommodation for the week in a beautiful traditional Spanish farmhouse, complete with paddocks, footpaths and numerous chickens and ducks!

Day 2

Sunday 18th September

The local chickens did the group proud with plenty of fresh eggs as part of our hearty breakfast!

We made a brief stop for fresh bread and a selection of excellent local cheeses from the local bakery and delicatessen before spending the day exploring the rocky crags and clifftops of the area's coastline.

Overhead was a superb gathering of migratory raptors and storks making ready to attempt the crossing to Africa – among them 137 Black Storks, six Egyptian Vultures, 32 Honey Buzzards, 184 Black Kites, 92 Griffon Vultures, 32 Short-toed Snake Eagles, 43 Booted Eagles, five Eurasian Sparrowhawks, 21 Marsh Harriers and four Lesser Kestrels! Two Bonelli's Eagles also put in an appearance!

Hirundines were on the move too, with Sand Martins, Barn Swallows, House Martins and Red-rumped Swallows all passing. Passerine migrants included Northern Wheatear, Tawny Pipit and *flava* Yellow Wagtails among the resident Thekla's Larks and Spanish Sparrows.

We celebrated our day with a good coffee at the hamlet of Los Porros before heading back to the cortijo to relax and use the swimming pool before dinner.

Day 3

Monday 19th September

This morning we headed to the *marismas* on the outskirts of the fishing town of Barbate. The estuarine mud was alive with waders. They were seemingly unbothered by our presence and we were able to get right in amongst them. Huge flocks of Common Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Sanderling and Dunlin probed the mud. Among them were Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stint, Black-winged Stilt, Grey Plover, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew, Oystercatchers, Common Redshank and Greenshank, Common Sandpiper and Red Knot. Caspian, Sandwich and Little Tern roosted on the mud and fished overhead. We also picked up Western Osprey and Western Marsh Harrier.

Especially thrilling was the sighting of a vagrant Terek Sandpiper - normally breeding in the boreal taiga zone and migrating to Africa via the Caspian and Middle East, this intrepid pioneer bird was here with us in The Straits, with an obvious leg injury but feeding well and seemingly winning at life!

Moving round to the nature reserve – a restored landfill site – we added 108 Audouin's Gull and eight Eurasian Stone Curlews to our list, as well as Pied Avocet Eurasian Spoonbill and 230 Greater Flamingoes. There were also Greater Short-toed Larks and both the Iberian and nominate *flava* subspecies of Yellow Wagtail.

After a brilliant morning, we headed for our picnic lunch of local cheeses, fresh bread, seasonal salad – and plenty of wine! – at the Breñas de Barbate woodland picnic area. A stroll after lunch yielded Western Bonelli's Warbler, Common Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, and migrant Pied Flycatcher and Common Redstart. Thirty European Honey Buzzards and Short-toed and Booted Eagles cruised overhead as a reminder of the constant flow of raptors here.

Heading back to our accommodation, the day had one last surprise in store – a flock of 38 Critically Endangered Northern Bald Ibis feeding in nearby fields! This extraordinary bird was reintroduced here in 2008 and is doing well! Nevertheless the flock in front of us represented around 4% of the remaining wild population so we felt truly privileged to watch them.

Day 4

Tuesday 20th September

Following several days of *levante* or easterly wind for which the area is well-known, the numbers of raptors gathering in the area waiting for the right crossing conditions was at saturation. Today the wind finally dropped and gave the group an absolute Raptorfest, with thousands of soaring avian migrants passing overhead to Africa.

We settled in to our spot on the cliffs above Tarifa with deck chairs to hand and simply spent the day watching the spectacle unfold!

Overhead we recorded 1,739 Booted Eagles, 875 Short-toed Eagles, 497 Black Kites, 173 Black Storks, 19 Egyptian Vultures, plus European Honey Buzzards, Montagu's and Marsh Harriers – just wow!

Among them were European Bee-eaters, Red-rumped Swallows with Barn Swallows, House and Sand Martins in between and so much more!

Zippering past, feeding in the pastures and flitting amongst the scrub were Thekla's and Crested Larks, Zitting Cisticola, Sardinian Warbler, Yellow Wagtail, Tawny Pipit and Cirl Bunting.

A real day to remember and we took our picnic right there in the heart of the action!

Day 5

Wednesday 21st September

We began the day on the farmlands of La Janda, a well-known local birding spot where the reed-fringed ditches, pasturelands and recently harvested rice fields provide a taste of the gem this place used to be when it was a freshwater lagoon just decades ago.

A wet flash in a field proved especially productive, hosting hundreds of Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbills Western Cattle and Little Egrets, Purple and Grey Heron. Busily-feeding waders included Black-winged Stilts, Little Ringed and Common Ringed Plover, Spotted Redshank, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper and more.

We also connected with another migratory pioneer– a Pectoral Sandpiper that breeds on the wet tundra in both the North American and Siberian Arctic and winters mostly in southern South America!

Other avian treats included Black-winged Kite, Bonelli's Eagles, European Turtle Dove, Common Kingfisher, European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Woodchat Shrike, Common Waxbill, and three harrier species - Montagu's, Marsh and Hen.

Banded Groundling dragonflies drifted by and we became engrossed by a Lesser Emperor devouring a Red-veined Darter!

And this was just the start! The perfect conditions we had waited for had finally arrived and so we took to the sea with Foundation FIRMM for our boat trip. It was an absolute joy, with Bottlenose Dolphins all around our boat, and great views of Long-finned Pilot Whales. Many Wilson's Storm-petrels could be seen skipping across the

waves, and we saw both Cory's and Balearic Shearwaters. A wonderful day was rounded off by views of Common Dolphins surfing the wake of our boat.

Day 6

Thursday 22nd September

We began our day with a stroll out to the intertidal habitat at Los Lances beach. On the low-intensity pastureland, we picked up flocks of Greater Short-toed and Calandra Larks as well as migrating Whinchat, Northern Wheatear and both *flava* and *iberiae* Yellow Wagtails. As the day warmed, we could pick up the beginnings of another big push of Red-rumped Swallows across The Straits.

In the pools in front of the hide, a medley of waders fed including Common Ringed, Kentish and Grey Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Sanderling, Dunlin and Little Stint. Out to sea we could pick up Cory's Shearwater and Northern Gannet.

As the thermals rose, we could see it was going to be a fine migration day! Between the various sites along the coast, we picked up many hundreds of Booted Eagles and Black Kites. We also encountered Egyptian Vulture, Honey Buzzard, Short-toed Eagle and more.

As our trip began to draw to a close, we celebrated our fantastic week with a slap-up *tapas*-style lunch at Venta Pelayo, a local restaurant run by the amazing Luisa. She specializes in traditional Andaluz cuisine and she made sure we didn't go hungry today! We dined well on *croquetas caseras* - home-made croquettes with various fillings of mushrooms, spinach or ham, *revuelto de asparagos* – wild asparagus turned in egg and delicious seasonal salad and lashings of Luisa's own particularly delicious chips!

Happily, there was time to relax and sleep it off or take a stroll around the grounds or swim before our final three-course dinner together!

Day 7

Friday 23rd September

All too soon the trip was at an end! We said our goodbyes to Laura and the team at the *cortijo* and made our way towards the airport.

There was time for one last fix of migration on the way, and once more there was a fantastic flow of hundreds of raptors over our heads, along with storks, hirundines and swifts. We were also thrilled to pick up a tagged Rüppell's Vulture! This African species is an increasingly common vagrant to southern Spain. The bird we saw was tagged as part of a project by Grepom (the Morocco Birdlife Partner) and the Moroccan government, monitoring the migration of these Critically Endangered Vultures.

A fitting send-off for a wonderful trip full of surprises!

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Species lists

Birds

I = Introduced		September 2022						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			4				
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			10				
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>					8		
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>					50	20	
Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>					6		
Wilson's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>					20		
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			230				
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	10	137		173		3	2
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	20			8	87		10
Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>			38				
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			20	5	240		20
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			4		8		
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1		5		4	4	2
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					1		
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			2		2	3	
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		1			4	2	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			6			1	
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			3				
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>					1		
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	1	6		19		3	4
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	11	32	30	12		1	
Rüppell's Vulture	<i>Gyps rueppelli</i>							1
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	10	94	17	4	10	30	20
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	8	32	2	875	4	37	30

I = Introduced		September 2022						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	23	43	1	173 9	10	658	200
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>		2					
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	2	5	4	17	4	5	7
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	4	21	15	2	22	4	4
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				2	2		
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>					1		
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	50	184	20	497	200	198	20
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1		1	2	2	1
Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>			8				
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			4				
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			43		6		
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			10				
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>					1		
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			40			3	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			200		30	50	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>					1		
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>			50			70	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					4		
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			4				
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			25			5	
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			11				
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			1				
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>					1		
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓		6		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			3			1	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					4		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			2				
Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>			1				
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>			4			3	
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>					6	1	
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			20		2	11	
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			70		1	143	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			50		3	20	
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			4		2	1	
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>					1		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓			1	
Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyiaetus audouinii</i>			108			1	
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyiaetus melanocephalus</i>			1				
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			6				
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>			2		4	3	
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>			1				
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		10	✓	✓	88	✓	✓
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>					1	3	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>					1	1	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	7				30		10

I = Introduced		September 2022						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>							4
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		1			1		
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	10			20	15	5	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>					2	2	1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			1				1
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	2	4		2	30	5	3
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1		1	1	2	1	2
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1					
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>					1		
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			2	3		2	4
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>							2
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		2	6	2			3
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	2	4	2	2	2	3	4
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		3		3		1	1
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			✓	4	✓	✓	✓
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			10		2	1	
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>						10	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		4	2	4	2	2	10
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		84	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		2		2	2	10	20
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>		22	2	104	10	89	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>					3		1
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		1					
Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			2				
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		2	4	2	5	8	2
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1	2			4	10
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	2	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			1				
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		1	3				2
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		4	✓	2	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>							2
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			5	1		2	
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			1				
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>			1			1	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		4			1	1	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		10			✓		
Common Waxbill - I	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>					2		
Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>			2		10	20	
Yellow Wagtail (Flava)	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>		8	10	14		4	20
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>							1
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			1	1			
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	1	1		1			1
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		2	5				✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓	✓	1	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

I = Introduced		September 2022						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>			1		✓		✓
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				1		1	1

Others

		September 2022						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Mammals								
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>					100		
Striped Dolphin	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>							
Bottle-nose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>					50		
Long-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala melas</i>					40		
Fish								
Mediterranean Flying Fish	<i>Cheilopogon heterurus</i>					✓		
Yellow-finned Tuna	<i>Thunnus albacares</i>					✓		
Sunfish	<i>Mola mola</i>					1		
Dragonflies								
Banded Groundling	<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>					✓		
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>			✓		✓		
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>					✓		
Butterflies								
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>					✓	✓	
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>					✓		
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>				✓		✓	
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>					✓	✓	
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>				✓	✓	✓	
Dusky Meadow	<i>Hyponphele lycaon</i>				✓	✓	✓	
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>						✓	
Crimson Speckled Footman	<i>Utetheisa pulchella</i>			✓		✓		
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>			✓				
Other species								
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓	✓	✓				
Iberian Marsh Frog	<i>Rana iberica</i>					✓		
Bee-fly	<i>Paragon gratis</i>		✓	✓				