

Go Slow in Andalucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 30th September 2022

Tour report by Niki Williamson



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) with a group of 14 Naturetrek Clients

Summary

In the Straits of Gibraltar, the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic and Africa is just fourteen kilometres from Europe – a real meeting place of continents and oceans! Our group found itself under the spectacular avian flow of the autumn migration, encountering thousands of raptors and soaring birds including Booted and Short-toed Eagles, White Storks, Black Storks, Egyptian Vultures, Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Griffon Vultures, Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Marsh Harriers, Bonelli's Eagles, Alpine Swifts, Red-rumped Swallows and more!

Out to sea, Cory's and Balearic Shearwaters skimmed over Long-finned Pilot Whales, while on the estuaries and wetlands thousands of shorebirds and gulls gathered close by, including Sanderling, Dunlin, Kentish, Grey, Little Ringed and Common Ringed Plover, Red Knot, Black-winged Stilt, Wood, Common and Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Ruff, Eurasian Stone-curlews and a surprise Pectoral Sandpiper!

Capped off with amazing food, accommodation in a beautiful traditional Spanish cortijo and lashings of icecream, it was definitely a trip to remember!

Day 1

Friday 23rd 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.

Contemplating their crossing of the sea to Africa, even at this time in the late afternoon, were Short-toed Eagles, Booted Eagles, Marsh Harriers, Black Kites, and a Honey Buzzard. Amongst them were migrating Barn Swallows, Red-rumped Swallows and House Martins.

Then it was on to Cortijo el Indiviso, where we settled into our accommodation for the week in a beautiful traditional Spanish farmhouse. We were soon tucking into our first fantastic three-course meal, with minty summer vegetable soup, local Iberian pork, potato salad, and *arroz con verduras* (a kind of vegetarian paella). Yum!

Day 2

Saturday 24th September

Today, after a hearty breakfast of great coffee, fresh local bread and eggs from the *cortijo's* chickens we headed straight out to try an encounter the area's amazing flow of avian migration.

On the clifftops above Tarifa, we could see right out across The Straits to the north coast of Morocco, and watch the birds on their journey. We found ourselves surrounded by House Martins and Red-rumped Swallow and over

70 enormous Alpine Swift! Here were also groups of European Bee-eaters passing high up, plus Cirl Bunting and Thekla's Larks in song flight.

As the air warmed it was truly a day of Eagles, with several hundred Booted and Short-toed Eagles passing right over us, enabling great comparisons between the two species, and between the pale and dark morphs of Booted Eagles. Among them were a fantastic array of other raptors and soaring birds, including Black Storks, Egyptian Vultures, Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Griffon Vultures, Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Marsh Harriers and Common Buzzard!

An unexpected and magnificent Rüppell's Vulture soared over, this Critically Endangered African Vulture becoming a more frequent vagrant to Spain in recent times.

We took our picnic right there in the heart of the action, but it was rudely interrupted by a group of over 200 White Storks sailing out in front of us to Africa!

Day 3

Sunday 25th September

Today we headed to the estuary at Barbate, where we took up positions under a bridge looking out over the exposed mud. From here we were on eye level with the busily-feeding waders, affording great views of many Sanderling, Dunlin and Common Ringed Plover, as well as Red Knot, Grey Plover in summer plumage, Curlew Sandpipers, Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew and Oystercatcher. Among them were Mediterranean and Slender-billed Gulls. A lone Western Osprey surveyed us from its perch and Mediterranean Fiddler Crabs provided extra amusement.

Moving on to the nature reserve created on disused salt pans, we had great views of both the *flava* and *iberiae* subspecies of Yellow Wagtails and we encountered a Eurasian Hoopoe.

There were more close views to be had of Sanderling, Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Kentish and Little Ringed Plover. We spotted a group of Eurasian Stone-curlews in flight, which then settled onto one of the islands. Our visit was topped off by nice scope views of a Common Kingfisher.

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. The woodland was dripping with migrant passerines, including Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Eurasian Blackcaps and Western Bonelli's Warblers, as well as resident Short-toed Treecreepers.

No day in The Straits is complete without an ice-cream, so we duly stopped for one just outside the town, where we found a flock of Common Waxbills flitting amongst the allotments!

We headed back to our accommodation mid-afternoon for relaxation before dinner, on the way stopping at a local golf course, where we found nine Critically Endangered Northern Bald Ibis strutting their stuff on the driving range! This extraordinary bird was reintroduced here in 2008 and is doing well. So well that we came across ten more perched on telegraph wires right next to the *cortijo*!

Day 4

Monday 26th September

Just ten minutes down the road from our accommodation lie the farmlands and rice fields 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.

We were greeted almost immediately by a beautiful Black-winged Kite perched on a post, which we were able to watch as it flew to another more distant perch.

The area was thronging with farmland birds, including huge flocks of Spanish Sparrows, Common Waxbills and Corn Buntings galore. Several Marsh Harriers hunted around us. We became quite engrossed by a Lesser Emperor dragonfly devouring a Red-veined Darter head first!

Distant flocks of Glossy Ibis on the move gave away the presence of a wet flash in a nearby field. We tiptoed over to find it alive with waders, including Black-winged Stilt, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper, Spotted and Common Redshank, Common Snipe and Ruff. The pick of the crop was a Pectoral Sandpiper visiting us from the Americas!

We took our picnic lunch under an ancient Cork Oak tree on the wooded slopes of nearby Monte Facinas, where we filled up our water bottles from a mountain spring.

Then it was a late afternoon coffee stop at the hamlet of Los Porros, where Simon and Niki also topped up on delicious local cheeses and meats from the delicatessen, and cake from the bakery, ready for the days to come!

Day 5

Tuesday 27th September

Tarifa's resident Common Bulbul - possibly the world's loneliest, and the only one in Europe – showed well in the car park as we arrived in town to catch our boat out into The Straits.

We walked down through the Old Town to the port, where we boarded a boat run by marine research foundation, FIRMM. Heading far out to the east into the Mediterranean section of The Straits, we picked up Cory's and Balearic Shearwaters, Audouins Gull and Northern Gannet.

After a while we encountered a couple of young male Long-finned Pilot Whales, which swam right under the boat - thrilling! Nearby we found a little family group of the same species, and we were able to watch the adorable small calf swimming alongside a female and a huge male.

We celebrated our close encounters with a delicious *tapas*-style lunch at Geko, one of our guides' favourite restaurants in Tarifa old town. *Tostadas* with sun-dried tomatoes, artichoke and olive topping, *padrón* peppers, home-made mushroom and spinach *croquetas*, fresh grilled prawns – the treats just kept coming! Then there was time to wander the picturesque streets or simply enjoy an ice cream in the sun!

Day 6

Wednesday 28th September

Another fantastic migration day, which we spent exploring several of the numerous watchpoints along the Tarifa coastline, judging each stop by the wind strength and direction to ensure the very best of encounters! Our guides' local knowledge paid off and we again found ourselves amongst many hundreds of migrating soaring birds, including 110 Short-toed Eagles, 138 Booted Eagles, 300 White Storks, European Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Black Storks, Egyptian Vultures, Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard, Bonelli's Eagle and more!

From the watchpoint of La Peña, we had wonderful close views of a small flock of Thekla's Larks as we took a stroll amongst the ancient sky burial sites of the area, with several open tombs hewn from the rocks.

We finished the day at the Griffon Vulture colony at La Zarga. Blue Rock Thrushes were visible singing from high perches and flitting amongst the crags of this spectacular mountain site. We finished the trip with the awe-inspiring sights and sounds of over 200 Griffon Vultures soaring over our heads, parallel-flying, calling to one another and squabbling over roosting ledges – just amazing!

Day 7

Thursday 29th September

All too soon it was time for the group to head home! We said our goodbyes to Laura and the team at the *cortijo* and made our way towards the airport at Gibraltar, with minds and memory cards full of happy memories and stunning images!

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.

Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays



www.twitter.com/naturetrektours



www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays

Species lists

Birds (I = Introduced)

	Common name	Scientific name	September 2022						
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>				2			
2	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			1				
3	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			2				
4	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			2				
5	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		1		7			
6	Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>		✓			10		
7	Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>					10		
8	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			230				
9	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		10				10	
10	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	10	227		66		300	
11	Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>			9				
12	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	20			200			
13	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			4				
14	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		1	4	8			
16	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			5	4			
17	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>					6		
18	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			22				
19	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			1				
20	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>				2			
21	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		3				6	
22	European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	1	13	1		6	10	
23	Rüppell's Vulture	<i>Gyps rueppelli</i>		1					
24	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	10	20		10	21	250	
25	Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	5	37		2	1	110	
26	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	17	682	4	6	4	138	
27	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>						2	
28	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	3	12	1	2		11	
29	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	7	5	3	11	3	4	
30	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	4	23	4	2	2	1	
31	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	2		2	1	1	
32	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>			17				
33	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			4				
34	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			43	8			
35	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			200				
36	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			30				
37	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			300	20			
38	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			3	1			
39	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>			70				
40	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				4			
41	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			32				
42	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			4				
43	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			1				
44	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>				1			
45	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			10	2			
46	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			3				

	Common name	Scientific name	September 2022						
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29
47	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>				4			
48	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>				1			
49	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			2				
50	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			1				
51	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>			4				
52	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>			2	2			
53	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			128	3			
54	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			80				
55	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			50	8			
56	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			2	3			
57	Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>				1			
58	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>			2				
59	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			67				
60	Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaelus audouinii</i>					1		
61	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaelus melanocephalus</i>			3				
62	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>							
63	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
64	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓				
65	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>			5				
66	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>			10				
67	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
68	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
69	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>				3			
70	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
71	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				1	1		
72	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1	1	1	2			
73	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymartus melba</i>		70					
74	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		1				1	
75	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		3				1	
76	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			2	2			
77	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		9	3				
78	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		1	1	1			
79	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>					1		
80	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>		3		5			
81	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1	2		2		2	
82	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
83	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	5		2	2	2	
84	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		2	7	2	2		
85	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	2	4	2	
86	Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		3				8	
87	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
88	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			2				
89	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		20					
90	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	11	✓	✓	
91	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	20	50		5		3	
92	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	50	750		30		4	
93	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		1		4	1	2	
94	Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			1				
95	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		1	2	10	1	3	
96	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1	2		2	2	

			September 2022						
	Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
97	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
98	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		1	1			1	
99	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			4			2	
100	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
101	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		1	10	1	1	1	
102	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			7	5	1		
103	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		1	4	8	2		
104	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		1	2	1			
105	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>						3	
106	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	2	10	4	10	2	4	
107	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>				1			
108	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
109	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>				1,000			
110	Common Waxbill - I	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>			10	8			
111	Yellow Wagtail (Flava)	<i>Motacilla flava flava</i>		7	2				
112	Iberian Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>			20	30		2	
113	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1					
114	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>					1		
115	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>		1					
116	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			4			2	
117	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		2		2		1	
118	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	2	10	2	20	2	4	
119	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
120	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>						1	
121	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		40		120	✓	30	
122	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>		1					

Others

		September 2022						
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Mammals								
Long-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala melas</i>					✓		
Dragonflies								
Banded Groundling	<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>				✓			
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>				✓			
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>				1			
Epaulet Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum chrysostigma</i>				1			
Butterflies & Moths								
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓	✓				
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓				
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>			✓				
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>				✓			
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>	✓		✓				
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>							
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>			✓				
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			

Common name	Scientific name	September 2022						
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>			✓				
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>				✓			
Southern Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia cecilia</i>		✓					
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>		✓		✓		✓	
Southern Brown Argus	<i>Aricia cramera</i>				✓			
Lang's Short-tailed Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>				✓			
Gypsy Moth	<i>Lymantria dispar dispar</i>				✓			
Other species								
Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulea</i>				✓		✓	
Iberian Marsh Frog	<i>Rana iberica</i>				✓			