

# Go Slow in Andalucia

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 23rd September 2023



Griffon Vulture



Spanish Sparrows



Kentish Plover



Rüppell's Vulture

Tour report by Niki Williamson, photos by Simon Tonkin



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Tour participants: Simon Tonkin and Niki Williamson (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients.

## Summary

A great trip to explore the Straits of Gibraltar at a leisurely pace! Spectacular autumn migration of soaring birds was going on all around as we witnessed thousands of raptors, storks and passerines make the crossing, including Short-toed Eagles, Booted Eagles, Black Kites, Honey Buzzards, Egyptian Vultures, White and Black Storks, Alpine, Common and Pallid Swifts and European Bee-eaters.

Other highlights included views of four Sperm Whales on our boat trip amongst Bottlenose Dolphins and Long-finned Pilot Whales, breath-taking encounters with Griffon Vultures at their colony, hunting Montagu's Harriers and Black-winged Kites at the ricefields and hundreds of waders including Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and Stone Curlew at the Marismas de Barbate.

Five-course *tapas* lunch in the Old Town of Tarifa was a delight, and our accommodation at the Cortijo el Indiviso – a lovingly restored Spanish farmhouse – was so good that it even included its own Northern Bald Ibis flock!

## Day 1

## Sunday 17th September

Simon and Niki collected the group from Gibraltar airport, and we headed across the border and loaded up the minibuses for our drive along the coast to Cortijo el Indiviso, our base for the next seven days.

On the way we stopped at Cerro del Tambor, a hillside overlooking the Straits of Gibraltar where we got our first spectacular views of Morocco, just across the water. We could also pick up two Egyptian Vultures, and many Black Kites, Short-toed Eagle and Honey Buzzards looking for their opportunity to cross the divide between continents.

Today was not their day however as a rain shower was heading in from the west. We had our lunch at a local *venta* or inn to beat the rain. The owner, our friend Luisa, made us lovely big sandwiches, chips and salad with local veg from her family allotment.

Continuing west along the coast, we dodged the shower and made another stop at Cazalla observatory, perhaps the best known of dozens of local raptor watchpoints. Here too there were dozens of raptors milling around waiting to cross, including our first Booted Eagles.

A nice orientation of The Straits, before completing the trip to our accommodation. But the journey was not over, and our final approach was interrupted by the surprise sight of eleven Northern Bald Ibis in a nearby paddock. These incredibly rare birds are doing well locally after a successful reintroduction programme in 2008 and have become regular winter visitors to the area close to the *cortijo*.

## Day 2

## Monday 18th September

This morning we headed to a raptor watchpoint called Cascabel, on the cliffs above Tarifa. Here we found assorted Short-toed Eagles, Booted Eagles, Black Kites and Honey Buzzards. There was also a Bonelli's Eagle!

We watched a group of a few dozen Griffon Vultures approaching overhead. As they got closer, not one but three of them turned out to be Rüppell's Vultures!

Next, we headed into Tarifa, to take our boat trip onto The Straits. We picked up Scopoli's and Balearic Shearwaters skimming over the waves.

We were enjoying watching Bottlenose Dolphins when Jose the boat guide spotted a blow - Sperm Whale! Then another – there were two of them! We sped towards them, but they dived before we got close. But then another blow was spotted! This whale was surrounded by Long-finned Pilot Whales, and we got great views before it tired of being harassed by the delphids and dived once more. Unbelievably, we picked up yet another blow! We got more fabulous views of this individual too, and we were surrounded by groups of Long-finned Pilot Whales for the remainder of the trip.

We headed back to the *cortijo* to chill, swim, and enjoy our picturesque surroundings at this lovingly-restored Spanish farmhouse set around its own cobbled courtyard, before taking dinner outdoors beneath the trees of the orange grove.

## Day 3

## Tuesday 19th September

Today our aim was to try to encounter some of the spectacular migration for which the area is well known, as hundreds of thousands of raptors and other soaring birds take to the air each autumn and attempt the short but treacherous crossing of the sea between Europe and Africa.

Taking into account the wind strength and direction, which has great influence over where the best experience is to be found, we headed to the watchpoint at Trafico, overlooking Tarifa and The Straits.

We soon found ourselves right under the migratory flow, with Black Storks, Egyptian Vultures, Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, Honey Buzzards, Eurasian Sparrowhawks, Black Kites and European Bee-eaters pouring overhead. Sixty Greater Flamingoes looked surreal flying across the sea.

We headed for our picnic at La Peña observatory, where we enjoyed fresh salads and bread, local cheeses, olives and wine at a leisurely pace, while Griffon Vultures and Honey Buzzards soared overhead.

On our way back to the *cortijo* we made a stop at the ricefields of La Janda, where highlights included huge flocks of Spanish Sparrows and nice views of a juvenile Montagu's Harrier.

## Day 4

## Wednesday 20th September

This morning we first took a look at the intertidal habitat at the seaside town of Bolonia. Kentish Plovers and Sanderling scampered around the sands, and we could see Scopoli's Shearwaters out to sea.

We next headed up to the craggy hills nearby, host to a large colony of Griffon Vultures. We spent the morning enjoying watching 70 of them soar and spiral above our heads, coming in low for some great photos, as well as Marsh Harrier, Short-toed Eagle and Booted Eagle. We also found some nice passerines including Western

Bonelli's Warbler, Common and Iberian Chiffchaff, Common Nightingale, Spotted and Pied Flycatcher, and Common Redstart. A Blue Rock Thrush showed well on the rocks and we heard an Iberian Green Woodpecker calling.

Next we headed into Tarifa for our slap-up *tapas* lunch. Our friend Patti – chef at Café Geko, a charming pavement café in the Old Town – did us proud with a broad selection of typically local dishes to share, including *tomates a la abuela* (“grannie’s tomatoes”), *pimiento frito* (deep fried local padron peppers), *croquetas caseras* (home-made croquettes of spinach, cheese and mushroom), crispy *empanadas* (tiny pasties!) and delicious grilled artichoke hearts with garlic and Iberian ham garnish. What a feast! Ever generous, she even offered us more courses but we decided to save our space for our delicious three-course meal to come that evening!

Afterwards there was time to wander in the picturesque Old Town of Tarifa.

## Day 5

## Thursday 21st September

After a brief stop to pick up supplies in the village of Tahivilla, we headed over the Marismas de Barbate, disused-saltpans-turned-nature-reserve. Waiting for us in a neighbouring paddock were our old friends the Northern Bald Ibis, perfectly lit and very close!

On the marshes themselves was a fabulous array of waders, including Kentish and Common Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit, Pied Avocet and more! There were loads of Yellow Wagtails of both the *flava* and *iberiae* subspecies. Greater Flamingoes and Audouin's Gulls looked fabulous while two Western Ospreys hunted. Moving a little further round the shoreline, we had our picnic lunch, followed up with views of three Eurasian Stone-curlews!

After a comfort break and time for an ice-cream, we took our places in a quiet little spot next to the mouth of the Rio Barbate and enjoyed extraordinary close views of feeding waders, practically scuttling over our feet! Eurasian Curlew and Whimbrel were added and we had great views of Grey Plover, Dunlin and Curlew Sandpiper in summer plumage. Sandwich and Caspian Terns loafed on the sand bars alongside two Slender-billed Gulls.

## Day 6

## Friday 22nd September

Today more fantastic migration encounters, the light westerly wind taking us to El Algarrobo watchpoint. Early on we were excited to pick up a Goshawk passing! The rest of the morning was just superb, not just for the numbers but also the quality views of the hundreds of birds migrating over our heads, which included Black Storks, Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, Honey Buzzards, Egyptian Vultures, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Marsh Harrier.

We headed to lunch at nearby El Bujeo, where we picked up a flock of over 200 White Storks swirling along the coast! We headed up into the heart of Los Alcornocales Natural Park, Europe's largest Cork Oak Forest. Here we visited a colony of the rare quasi-endemic plant *Drosophyllum lusitanicum* - Portuguese Sundew. We had amazing views of three Firecrests right above our heads, and a huge Monarch butterfly sailed by.

We next made a second more in-depth visit to the farmlands of La Janda. Highlights included huge flocks of almost a hundred Glossy Ibis feeding and flying in a wet field, and superb views of a hunting Montagu's Harrier amongst 10+ Lesser Kestrels. We finished on mega views of two beautiful Black-winged Kites!

Back at the *cortijo* we enjoyed another of chef Stephanie's delicious three course meals.

## Day 7

**Saturday 23rd September**

Today our trip came to an end and Simon and Niki dropped the group back at Gibraltar airport, wishing them goodwill for their flights home.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	September 2023						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>						4	2
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	10	70				✓	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>						✓	
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>	3						
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	1			4		✓	✓
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>				1			
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			1				
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>					2		
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			60		240		
Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>					3		
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>					3		
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>					40		
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>					50		
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>					15		
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				1	50		
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>				3	20		
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>					8		
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>					2		
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>					4		
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>					10		
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>					54		
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>					3		
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>					4		
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>					20		
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				6	70		
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>					120		
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>					25		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>					4	2	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>						1	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					30		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					3		
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>					2		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>					20		
Audouin's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus audouinii</i>					70		
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>					3		
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				1	10		
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>					6		
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>					5		
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>					2		
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>		2					
Scopoli's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	4	40		✓			
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>		2					

Common name	Scientific name	September 2023						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Balearic Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>		5		10			
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	4	8	42	2		11	2
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	60	20	87	4	4	202	20
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		1		3			
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>					50		
Northern Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>	11	4	23	4	15	3	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			11		50	90	20
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>					16		
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			2		6	5	3
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		1	4		3	3	1
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1				2		
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>						3	
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	2	3	3			4	
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	31	5	4			50	
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	20	35	40	70	20	40	20
Rüppell's Vulture	<i>Gyps rueppelli</i>		3					
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	15	34	6	3	2	26	10
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	41	89	109	4	1	66	15
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>		1					
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	4	3	12	5	2	14	2
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>						1	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2		2	1	5	15	4
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			1			1	
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	6	1	19				5
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1	3	2	1	1	1
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		1	1	2	2	2	2
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			1				
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>				1	2		
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					1	2	
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	10	40	20				20
Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>				1			
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	1	2				16	2
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1		2		2	4	
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>	4	2	2	4	3	6	2
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	1	2	2	4	2	6	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	1	1	2	2	1	4	✓
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	1	2	4	2			
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>					3		
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>					20	10	5
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>				11			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>			2		3	6	✓

Common name	Scientific name	September 2023						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	1					2	1
Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>				2			
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	2		3	1	2		
Iberian Chiff-chaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>				3		4	
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			2	4	5	8	3
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	1			2	1	4	2
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	1						1
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>						8	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	1	2			2	1
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>						1	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>						3	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1	2	3	1	1	4	2
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				2	1	1	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				2		2	1
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		2	1	3		2	
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>				2		3	
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	1			1			
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				1			
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>						1	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1	1		2		
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓			✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	3	5	200	2	70	20	20
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				1		1	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>							1
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			3				
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	4			5		✓	2
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	2	2		2	2	2	4
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		4	6		10	15	10
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		8	6	10	12	✓	✓
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>			1	2			



## Others

		September 2023						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
MAMMALS								
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>		✓					
Long-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala melas</i>		✓					
Sperm Whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>		4					
REPTILES								
Spanish Pond Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>			✓				
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Vaucher’s Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis iberica</i>							
Large Psammodromus	<i>Psammodromus algirus</i>						1	
Horseshoe Whip Snake	<i>Hemorrhois hippocrepis</i>						✓	
DRAGONFLIES								
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>	✓		✓			✓	
Banded Groundling	<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>			✓			✓	
BUTTERFLIES								
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓	✓				
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓					
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>			✓				
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>						✓	
African Monarch	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>			✓				
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>			✓			✓	
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>		✓					
OTHER INVERTEBRATES								
Violet Carpenter Bee	<i>Xylocopa violacea</i>		✓					
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>						✓	
Red-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda germanica</i>			✓				
Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulescens</i>				✓		✓	
Fire bug	<i>Pyrrhocoris apterus</i>					✓		
Dung Beetle spp							✓	